


The Hill Kharia OF PURULIA

IMPACT OF POVERTY
ON A HUNTING AND GATHERING TRIBE

Dikshit Sinha



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**A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON A
HUNTING AND GATHERING TRIBE**

DIKSHIT SINHA



**ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
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FOREWORD

In his book, *The Hill Kharias of Dhalbhum* (1931), Professor T. C. Das had observed that living as marginal hunters and gatherers, the Hill Kharia appeared to him as suffering from depletion of culture under conditions of perpetual poverty. The Hill Kharia came under the purview of Criminal Tribes Act of 1924 for their alleged habitual tendency to commit crimes. Although this Act was repealed in 1952 and the Hill Kharia of Purulia and adjacent regions were designated as a 'denotified tribe', the stigma of criminality continues to hang on them and they are under perpetual surveillance of the local police.

Dr. Dikshit Sinha was interested in probing deeply into the impact of economic deprivation of social marginality on the socio-cultural life of the traditional hunting and gathering Hill Kharia tribe of Purulia District. The monograph is based on field research between 1974 and 1975 and then again in 1977. He was particularly interested to find out the reasons for the alleged widespread participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities.

Dr. Sinha observed that the traditional forest resources of the Hill Kharia had been rapidly depleting and they were depending more and more on daily agricultural labour. They are, however, virtually landless and precariously stick to the dwindling forest resources. The forests, however, no longer carry a message of bounty and assurance. There is no trace of the "original affluent hunters" among the Hill Kharia.

The Hill Kharia suffer from a perpetual feeling of poverty and deprivation and consider the peasant way of life as not only more prosperous, but more full and desirable. Dr. Dikshit Sinha has demonstrated how this condition of poverty has been internalised through myth, often creating an image of role inversion: the noble and powerful Kharia (Savar) vis-a-vis the greedy, jealous and incompetent heroes of the plains.

There is no doubt that elemental hunger and deprivation have moved the Kharia towards stealing and other criminal activities. Dr. Sinha has shown how the Kharia have been entrapped into criminal activities by their patrons who usually belong to the dominant peasant castes and have powerful linkages with the police.

In successive historical periods the Kharia appears to have had increasingly withdrawn into hill forests environment in the course of their encounters with the more dominant and numerous Bhumij, Santal and the Kurmi-Mahato. The Hill Kharia carry the marks of this spirit of

withdrawal of a 'refuge community' passing through a phase of 'secondary primitivisation'. Although poverty curtails the optimization of the culture of the group, they have been able to preserve the basic fabric of social structure, particularly the roles in the family. They have learnt to live with scarcity and periodic hunger.

This carefully analysed ethnography suggests the need for controlled comparative study of the secondary hunters and gatherers in Purulia and neighbouring regions : the Hill Kharia, Birhor, Pahira and the Lodha. What are the specific contexts of ecology, techno-economy, demography and of inter-ethnic encounters which are leading some groups towards hostile and so-called criminality and others to relatively peaceful withdrawal and co-existence ?

Dr. Dikshit Sinha has proved that an anthropologist has a special advantage over the conventional social surveyors in establishing rapport with the people because they genuinely present themselves as learners from the indigens. I expect that this important monograph will be carefully studied by interested social scientists and also by administrators and social workers entrusted with the welfare and development of marginal tribal groups.

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To my colleagues in the Anthropological Survey of India, I am grateful for various suggestions and criticisms. To Shri P. P. Mahato I am beholden for suggesting the name of the village Kulabahal as a possible area of fieldwork and introducing me to the school teachers of the village. I am grateful to Shri Indranil Pal for patiently typing the manuscript.

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Dikshit Sinha

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NOTE ON LOCAL WORDS USED IN THE TEXT

All local words used in the text have been italicised. Where the local words stand for the name of the deities these begin with capital letters. In case of the other words small letters have been used. When the words first appear in the text these have been explained either in the text or within brackets. Many names of animals and indigenous plants have been used. The scientific names of animals and plants could not be identified in many cases because of paucity of time. In such cases the names without their English or scientific equivalents have been given.

Wherever possible it has been tried to approximate the local pronunciation in our spellings.

Introduction

The effect of poverty has been variously examined in the context of stratified civilized societies and there already exists a wide body of literature on the subject (Whyte 1943, Harrington 1962, Gans 1962, Lewis 1965, Fonesca 1971, Dantwala 1973, Desai 1970). But it has not adequately been examined at the level of preliterate tribal communities. In this small book, a slightly modified version of the dissertation submitted to the University of Calcutta in 1979, I will try to trace the impact of poverty on the Hill Kharia society and explore how far some of their intra-community behaviour as well as the pattern of inter-community interaction may be explained as due to the consequence of their socio-economic condition.

Anthropologists have long been accustomed to view the "primitive culture" in the Rousseauan mould as being homogeneous, satisfying, having a perfect fit between nature and society, and above all possessing a "genuine culture" (Sapir 1964). Therefore, instances of study showing disorganization or drastic alteration in the "primitive culture" have been very few with the exceptions of Holmberg (1950), Honigmann (1949) and Gardner (1966). With the kind of perception that Anthropologists have about the tribal life it is not surprising that the existence of concept of poverty and its impact on the "primitive culture" is even more emphatically denied. Thus Oscar Lewis whose heuristic concept of "culture of poverty" attracted much criticism on methodological, analytical and ethical grounds, repudiated that poverty had any impact on the preliterate people. He averred that :

Many of the primitive or preliterate peoples studied by anthropologists suffer from dire poverty which is the result of poor technology and/or poor natural resources, or of both but they do not have the traits of subculture of poverty.....In spite of their poverty they have relatively integrated, satisfying and self-sufficient culture (1966, XLVIII).

Although Lewis reasoned that the analytical concept of culture of poverty was not applicable to the preliterate communities anthropologists, in general, were of the view that hunting and gathering societies all over the world led a wretched existence, hard put to meet their basic needs until Marshal Sahlins made a reappraisal of the "material process of life" of these societies. After examining the economic condition of hunting and gathering tribes of Africa, Australia, Oceania and South America Sahlins came to the conclusion that these societies far from being poverty-stricken were really the "original affluent society" (Sahlins 1972). Deprecating the tendency among anthropologists to impute the so-called "bourgeois" concept of civilised societies' needs on the hunting and gathering communities he pointed out that there could be more than one way to cope with want. Apart from the civilised societies' perennial effort to bridge the irreconcilable gap between scarce resources and human wants there may also be another solution to poverty, namely, the Zen solution which views the "human material wants" as "finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate". Sahlins pointed out that by "adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty—with a low standard of living" (*ibid* : 2). He demonstrated that hunting and gathering societies enjoyed a "kind of material plenty" which the underutilized and generally remained contented with the fulfilment of their limited culturally determined requirements :

The World's most primitive people have few possessions, *but they are not poor*. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends ; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization (*ibid* : 37).

But not all hunting and gathering societies all over the world enjoy material plenty which they can exploit at their will. Sahlins himself also noted (*ibid* : 8) that in many places hunting and gathering tribes were pushed to inhospitable terrains. In the Indian mainland, most of the hunting and gathering societies have long been denied isolation and surrounded by more dominant ethnic groups who have literally encysted them. Consequently, they have also been denied the privilege to exclusive exploitation of an ecological niche. Sinha (1969) characterised the hunting and gathering societies of the Indian mainland as "secondarily primitivized". He pointed out that the exclusive dependence of hunting and gathering tribes of mainland India is a case of "devolution" from shifting cultivation, "in response to the penetration of caste based economy into these areas and extensive deforestation which make the earlier pattern of primary dependence on shifting cultivation untenable" (*ibid* : 164).

Some anthropologists have noted that even in this "secondarily primitivized" condition hunting and gathering tribes of India could not rely exclusively on forest. Bose (1956) described the Birhor as a sort of caste performing and enjoying an exclusive economic role vis-a-vis the peasants. Fox (1969) saw their role as "professional primitives" who, because of their knowledge of forest ecology, could gather various forest produce and supply these to the peasants who needed these and had otherwise no avenue to acquire them. But within the past few decades the insistent demand of land by peasants also destroyed their last refuge, the forest. As an inevitable consequence they are now being increasingly drawn into market relationship. The peasant societies that are already entrenched in the area made their effort to acquire new means of production, namely, land all the more difficult. Barring a few cases of exceptional success most of these relentlessly-pushed-about-people set up a marginal economic and social relationship with the peasants. From the view point of relations of production and access to the means of production they now constitute a category of "have nots". Although they are unable to coalesce with other such groups of "have nots" living in the village, their relation with the landed peasants and perception of the situation have a close similarity with the "class situation" that is hard to ignore.

THE PROBLEM

The Hill Kharia of Purulia and Singbhum districts, with whom we are concerned here, underwent secondary primitivization descending down the evolutionary scale from shifting cultivation to hunting and gathering (Sinha 1969). In the 1930's they were studied by two perceptive practitioners of anthropology, namely, Das (1931) and Roy (1937). The impression of the quality of life of the tribe that these two anthropologists gave were polar opposites. Das who studied the Hill Kharia for a short period in a hamlet of a village situated near Ghatsila in Dhalbhum district of Bihar found them morose and dejected. While Roy (1937) found in the Hill Kharia living in the adjacent district of Mayurbhanj of Orissa nothing abnormal. The people were happily pursuing their way of life and generally gave an impression of having great repose in their existential situation.

Now-a-days the Hill Kharia find that due to large scale denudation of forest hunting and gathering as an exclusive mode of subsistence is no longer possible. Instead they are now compelled to seek anchorage in the agricultural economy of the region. In the present day they are frequently found as an appendage of the village society frantically searching for an existence in a receding forest and as agricultural

labourer. Not only has their previous base of economy been destroyed but their concept of "good life" has also been irrevocably changed. The Hill Kharia view their situation in contrast to the peasants as lacking certain desirable things like cultivable land and food. This has generated a notion of being poor relative to the peasants. Although this is a subjective assessment of the situation it fairly corresponds to the reality.

Periodic hunger perhaps, is a part of hunters and gathers' way of life. That the Hill Kharia also know the existence of such contingent situation is evident from their adage, "*shikar naite bhikari*" (with failure of hunting one becomes destitute). But previously they were secure in their belief in the bounteousness of the forest. If one failed to hunt on a particular day it was looked upon as due to sheer concatenation of several uncontrollable factors, mainly of magical nature. It was believed that in the next day they were bound to reap rich harvest. But now-a-days the Hill Kharia do not have any faith in the bounteousness of the nature. Rather the spectre of starvation stares them in the face constantly. Their heart is not kindled by any hope that the morrow will bring better prospect. It is noteworthy that of the three kinds of starvation reported by Gupta (1977 : 88) from among the tribals of Gujarat the Hill Kharia suffer from the most severest kind of starvation, that is, they have to go without the two principal meals for days on end periodically and practically subsist on one meal a day for a prolonged period.

It may also be pointed out that the peasant society has become the reference group for them to emulate. They are constantly reminded that although they are severely handicapped by lack of food, the peasants, at least a major section of them, are relatively free from it.

Another additional feature of the Hill Kharia society is the "stigma" of being "criminal". We use the word "stigma" in the sense that Goffman (1963) has used :

While the stranger is present before us evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind—in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our mind from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma (*ibid* : 2-3).

How the Hill Kharia came to be known as "criminal", though could not be ascertained, it was known to be fairly old. Even at the beginning of early part of twentieth century Coupland (1911) mentioned the Hill Kharias' participation in various kinds of criminal activities like burglary, stealing, etc. (*ibid* : 82). As a consequence of this stigma they came under the purview of "Criminal Tribe Act" of 1924 declared by the then

British Government. Although this Act was repealed in 1952 and the Hill Kharia were designated as a "Denotified Tribe" the stigma has stuck. The police still behave towards the tribe as if any person born as Hill Kharia automatically becomes a criminal and makes oneself a possible target of arrest at the slightest pretext. This situation, coupled with the marginal position of the tribe in the regional society, has generated in the mind of the tribe a notion of powerlessness and anxiety.

Thus the relative deprivation suffered by the Hill Kharia may be categorised under three heads : (1) felt economic deprivation, (2) marginality of the Hill Kharia vis-a-vis the rural society, (3) notion of powerlessness vis-a-vis the peasant society. All the three factors act in unison and have a cumulative effect to generate the notion of relative deprivation and its consequence on the Hill Kharia society.

HYPOTHESES

The problem of studying the impact of poverty on the Hill Kharia society was approached with the following hypotheses in mind :

(1) As the Hill Kharias live in close association with the peasants for a proper understanding of their social organisation the situation of the felt economic deprivation has to be analysed relative to the peasants.

(2) Conditions of deprivation will have an impact on their social structure and institutions, constraining their optimal operation.

(3) Some identifiable adaptive social and cultural devices may be found in the Hill Kharia society in response to the situation of poverty that they suffer from. These will be reflected in their mode of socialization and rationalization of the felt situation of deprivation.

(4) The so-called "criminal tendencies" and activities among the Hill Kharia can only be understood by analysing their adaptive strategies in a situation of deprivation.

THE AREA OF STUDY

The Hill Kharia inhabit the border districts situated at the trijunction of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa states. In West Bengal they are mainly found in Purulia district. Apart from this, they are found to inhabit some adjacent police stations of Bankura and Midnapur districts. The present work was mainly done in Purulia district. However, field work was carried out for a short period in a Hill Kharia village situated in the hilly tracts of Singbhum district of Bihar.

RESEARCH METHOD

I began field work among the Hill Kharia in the month of September 1974 and ended the first phase of data collection by the end of January

1975. The last phase of field work was taken up in 1977 when about three months' work was done from April 1977 to July 1977. Between these two phases short field trips of a fortnight to a month's duration were undertaken in the months of June 1975, February and April 1976.

Before taking up this project I carried out intensive study of a slum in Calcutta where I studied the effect of poverty on the socio-cultural life of the slum dwellers (Sinha 1972). After completion of the project it was felt that we need to probe into the "primitive cultures" for an understanding of the possible impact of felt economic deprivation on the society. We decided to study the Hill Kharia tribe of Purulia district because this tribe has been suffering from great economic hardship due to erosion of their former economic base in the forest which may have led them to an adaptive strategy that marked them for their so-called "criminal" nature.

A village named Bandhodabari in Bundwan police station of Purulia district was first selected for intensive study of the Hill Kharia society. This Hill Kharia village was sheltered under a barren hillock situated close to the neighbouring multi-ethnic village, Sirishgarha. The village was chosen for two reasons. It was fairly close to the villages of other peasant groups and it had a sizeable Hill Kharia population. But when I first went to Purulia for field work the road communicating the village with Purulia district was cut off due to monsoon and consequent bad road condition.

Therefore, we selected a fresh village in Hura police station, namely, Kulabahal which conformed to the criteria mentioned above. The data presented in this dissertation are mainly based on the intensive study of this village. Later on we also studied three other villages, one each in Purulia, Hura and Puncha police stations for cross-checking the data collected from Kulabahal. To study the situational context in which the Hill Kharias live I also visited a few villages in Manbazar, Puncha and Bundwan police stations.

The Hill Kharia of Purulia, Singhbhum, Bankura and Midnapur live not only in proximity with the peasants but also in a few places like Bankura they have even become totally dependent on agricultural labour. Nevertheless, it was hoped that in and around the Dalma hill range in Patamda police station (district : Singhbhum) we would find Hill Kharias who depended, even now, to a great extent on forest for getting their subsistence and thus would provide a contrastive perspective to the Hill Kharia of Purulia. For this purpose we chose a village called Laraidungri, a village nestled under the hilly tract of the Dalma range.

Utilizing the conventional tools used by social anthropologists, e.g., participant observation, observation, interview, census, case history, etc., I collected data from the Hill Kharia as well as from the other ethnic groups living in Kulabahal. To understand the economic transactions, social relationship, and "criminal tendencies" of the tribe it was necessary to study them in relation to the ethnic groups living around them. Therefore, extension of our enquiry beyond the narrow domain of the Hill Kharia hamlet became an absolute necessity.

My first experience of studying a tribal community, which started with the Hill Kharia tribe, proved to be a difficult task. Centuries of prosecution as so-called criminals has left an indelible mark on their behaviour. They are highly suspicious of any outsider, especially of the so-called educated, shirt and trouser attired *babu* from urban areas. On the first day as soon as I reached the hamlet all adult male members fled to the nearest thickets. Only kids and women could be accosted. But they just refused to interact with me. On the second day I requested Swami Sivananda Giri, who was a local man and had established a high school near the village and was thus held in high esteem for his social service, to accompany me. His shouts drew out a thin man from a hut. He said that for the last two days he and his family had not eaten anything. That morning he had borrowed a little *kodo* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) from a peasant which proved to be of an intoxicating variety and had made him sleepy. He obviously looked weak from hunger. Swamiji introduced me to the man and through him I explained my purpose of the visit. Thus I launched my field work among the Hill Kharia. I expected that as the intensity of my rapport would improve the quality and quantity of data would also increase. But this was not to be so. I found that the Hill Kharia did not communicate with outsiders with facility. I thought that the difference in speech habit between my informants and I perhaps hindered communication. When I acquired some knowledge about their dialect I found the same difficulty of conversing with them persisted. Moreover, their suspicion about my motive also remained. I tried to circumvent this by doing voluntary social work for them which no person from higher ethnic group usually came forward to do. Thus the months of September-October being the most difficult period for them as far as food supply was concerned, I tried to persuade Block Development Officer to allocate gratuitous relief for them. On a few occasions I did succeed. Another opportunity also came to me. A primary school was being organized by three young boys of the locality in the Hill Kharia hamlet. These young boys were trying their utmost to get the government's recognition for the school. The

powerful village faction that was then at the helm of the village affairs and controlled the Gram Panchayat was also trying various tricks one after the other, to dislodge these teachers from the hamlet and get a school sanctioned for their main hamlet which was inhabited by the major ethnic groups and where their own relatives could be installed as teachers of the school. The Hill Kharia were helpless spectators to all these manoeuvres and were themselves subjected to various kinds of pressures and counter-pressures. Without being overtly alligned with any factions I tried to plead with the district authorities and impress upon them the importance of the school to the poor Hill Kharia. Although I did not succeed in securing the recognition of the government for a school among the Hill Kharia I hoped that with my sincere effort to help them I would be able to generate a measure of confidence and trust in me in the minds of the Hill Kharia.

But even all these did not carry me far in getting them disclose why they were being drawn in criminal activities. Even when I confronted them with concrete evidence of their involvement in criminal activities as I learnt from the other villagers they dismissed these vehemently as *micha katha* (lies).

Ultimately this apparently insurmountable barrier was overcome in a most unexpected manner. After about three months of my return to Calcutta from the first phase of field work, I received a pathetic letter (Appendix I) from the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal written through the primary teachers of the hamlet. The letter stated that six of their relatives were arrested by the police from a marriage ceremony for alleged involvement in dacoities in two adjacent villages. They hoped that I would be able to rescue them from this difficult situation and promised that this time if I visited them they would make a clean breast of everything. I seized the opportunity of establishing rapport by both hands, although I could not help them so far as their release from prison was concerned.

That said, it may be pointed out here that although the ruse employed by me helped me to realise my goal I could not fail to notice the eagerness with which the people tried to keep alive their relationship with me, with the fond hope that I would help them to tide over various crises that emanate from their interaction with village society and the police. As it usually happened in course of such interaction in field situation the benefit of relationship thus developed was wholly balanced in favour of me while the prosecuted, hapless, and helpless people remained where they were.

Finally, it may be noted that in the pages that follow the major emphasis has been given on analysing the problem itself. Keeping in

view the focus of the study I have given the ethnographical data wherever necessary. Wherever possible the salient points of the Hill Kharia's custom and their society's structural peculiarities have been highlighted. But keeping in view the purpose of the book the detail analysis of the structure has not been attempted. I have endeavoured to keep myself confined only to the examination and demonstration of the problem of poverty among a hunting and gathering community like the Hill Kharia.

Background Information

The district of Purulia is located in the border of Bihar and West Bengal. It was carved out of the former district of Manbhum of Bihar in 1956 and added to West Bengal. Geographically, it is part of the Chotanagpur plateau consisting of "succession of rolling uplands with intervening hollows" and infertile lateritic soil. It lies between 22.60' and 23.50' north latitude and 85.75' and 86.65' east longitude. The district has an area of 6,259.0 sq. km. and in 1971 the total population stood at 16,02,875 (Census Handbook 1971). Like the topography of the district its population structure has several points of dissimilarity with that of the rest of West Bengal. It has the highest percentage of scheduled tribes, 19.58% (West Bengal 5.72%). The bulk of its population consists of Hinduized and semi-Hinduized communities who still preserve some of the life style of their tribal forefathers. Economically, the district is one of the poorest among the sixteen districts of West Bengal. Only 45.01% people are landowning and 33.37% landless, there being 20% increase of landless people from 1961 to 1971 (*ibid*). The district was once covered by thick *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) forest populated by a rich fauna (Coupland 1911). But now this forest is almost lost. Only occasional trees and thickets attest to the past environment.

THE TRIBE

The Hill Kharia used to be a hunting and gathering tribe belonging to proto-australoid racial stock that live dispersed in the border districts situated at forested tri-junction of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In Purulia the Hill Kharia are found in 7 out of 16 police stations situated on the eastern side of the district. They are also found in three police stations (Raipur, Ranibandh and Indpur) of Bankura district contiguous with Purulia, in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa, in Singhbhum and Dhalbhum districts of Bihar and in some isolated pockets of western part of Binpur police station of Midnapur district of West Bengal. The Hill Kharia are so-called because they used to live in and around the hilly tracts. They

are sometimes referred to as wild *Erenga* or *Pahari* Kharia. The peasants among whom they live call them as Kharia. The tribe now use the mythical term Sabar as their name. In this book we will use the term Hill Kharia for consistency as well as to distinguish the tribe from other types of Kharias, e.g., Dudh and Dhelki of Ranchi district.

According to S. C. Roy (1937) the Hill Kharia represent the archaic form of the more evolved Dudh and Dhelki Kharias who live in the adjoining areas Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. He was of the opinion that the centre of dispersal of the Hill Kharia was Mayurbhanj district of Orissa (*ibid*: 31). In support of this he mentioned the occurrence of a few Oriya words in the dialect of the Hill Kharia of Singhbhum and Manbhum districts. Dasgupta (1971) too in course of a linguistic study found a few Oriya words in the dialect of the Hill Kharia of Purulia district. He could not find any trace of Austro-Asiatic dialect spoken by the present day Dudh and Dhelki Kharias, which one would have expected if the supposed evolution of the Dudh and Dhelki Kharias from Hill Kharia stock was true. The Hill Kharia themselves deny any affinity with the Dudh and Dhelki Kharia.

According to Grierson (1903) the Hill Kharia speak a western form of Bengali. Now-a-days the Hill Kharia, apart from speaking a form of dialect which shows affinity with Bengali, also freely converse in the local form of Bengali used by the peasants. Even the songs sung by them during marriage ceremony are in the local Bengali dialect.

The Hill Kharia show some regional variation in terms of clan organization and ritual observances. One story told by the tribe related that the ancestor of Hill Kharia lived around Dalma hill range. They were three brothers. The youngest brother one day quarrelled over division of food and went away towards south, that is, towards Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. Before going away he told his other two brothers that if ever they or their progeny came to his area they would be cursed by sterility. This brother according to the story, had seven sons.

According to the Hill Kharia of Purulia three kinds of Kharia can be distinguished. Below different categories of Kharia and their geographical location is described.

Sub-group of the Kharia	Location
1 Mura Kharia (Pahira)	Singhbhum district of Bihar, Purulia district of West Bengal
2 Oriya Kharia	Mayurbhanj district of Orissa

Sub-group of the Kharia	Location
3 Kharia/Kheria	Purulia, Bankura districts of West Bengal and Singhbhum district of Bihar. Dhalbhum district of Bihar and Midnapur district of West Bengal. This group is sometimes called by the name <i>Sainthia</i> Kharia, i.e., Kharia inhabiting Samantabhum

The Hill Kharia of Purulia say that they do not have any social intercourse with the Hill Kharia of Orissa. The latter's language, style of life, are thought to be different from those living in Purulia. The Mura Kheria or Pahira are treated as a separate community. Thus most of the hunting and gathering tribes living in the region are mentioned in the story related by the tribe.

The total number of the Hill Kharia is not known exactly. In census they are enumerated under different names and frequently they are branded together with the Lodha, Pahira, Kherwar or other such communities. The confusion has become even worse because of the tendency of some Hill Kharia to identify themselves as Sabar. This name has also been taken up by a few other primitive tribal groups, like the Lodha, Birhor, Pahira, etc. In Purulia district the largest concentration of the Hill Kharia is in Manbazar P. S. which also happens to be the largest police station of the district. According to the Tribal Welfare Officer of the district the following number of Hill Kharia families is distributed in the seven police stations :

1 Bundwan	160 families
2 Manbazar	260 families
3 Purulia Muffasil	90 families
4 Puncha	150 families
5 Balarampur	160 families
6 Barabazar	175 families
7 Hura	85 families

Total number of families : 1080

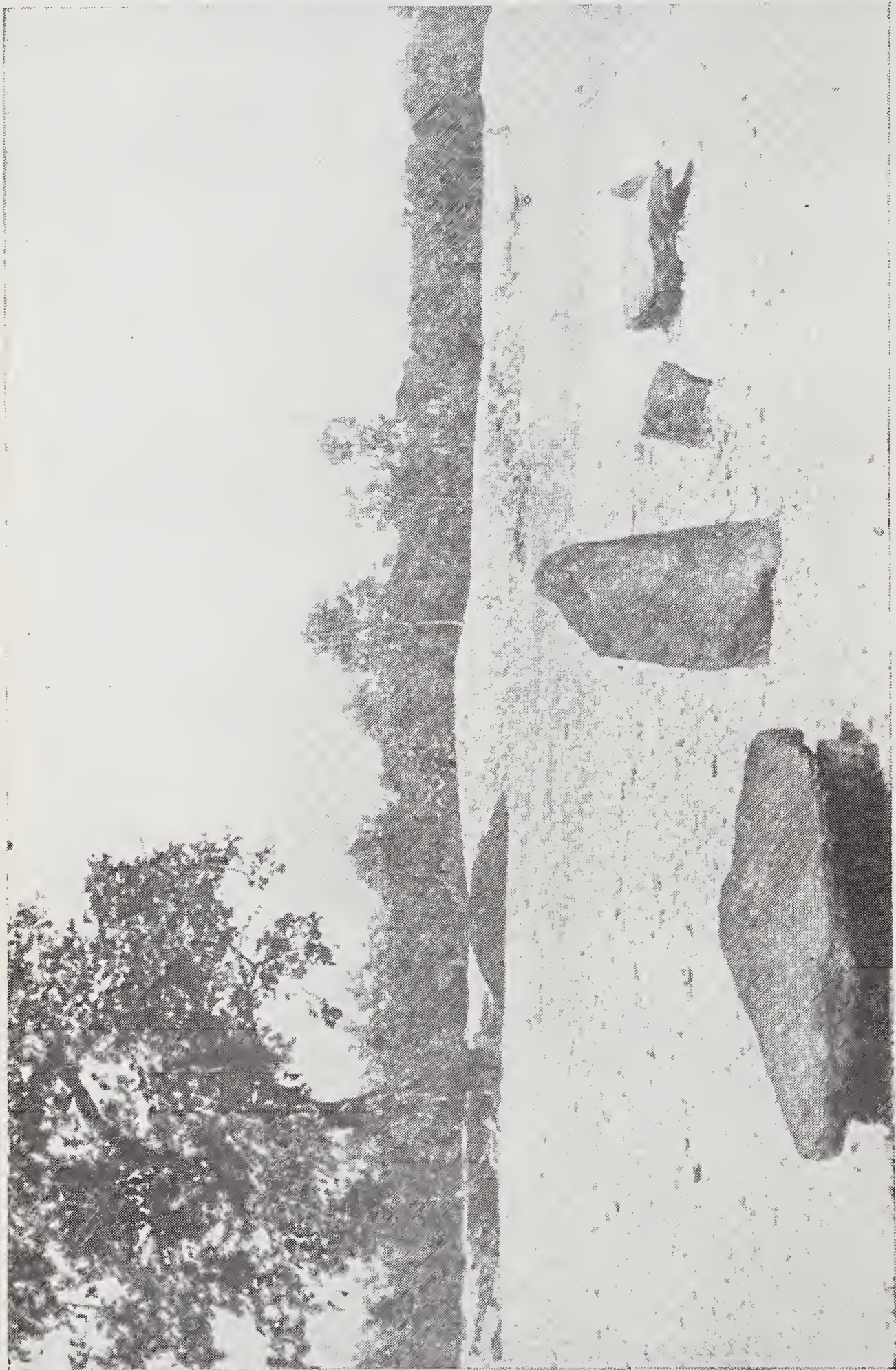
THE SETTING

The village Kulabahal is situated in Hura police station. It is about 26 km. away on the eastern side of Purulia town. To get to the village one has to walk about 8 km. after getting down from bus at Lakshanpur village on Hura-Purulia road. The village Kulabahal was once a part



*An example of the degenerated condition of some of the Hill Kharia huts
constructed by the Tribal Welfare Department.*

Plate 2



Clan Ossuary of the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal

of Ladhurka pargana of former princely state of Panchakot. Originally inhabited by the Santal, Bhumij and the Mal (Muslim brass metal workers) communities the village was surrounded by Rakab forest which, I was told, once was very dense and stretched to nearly 51 km. in length. Kulabahal has a total land area of 917 acres of which 439 acres are fallow (*taur*) land and 27 acres are forest land.

At present Kulabahal have 10 ethnic groups (Table 1) of which the Kurmi Mahato are the most dominant, both numerically and economically. In fact, they are the largest single ethnic group in Purulia district. Of the six villages situated around Kulabahal except in one (Sijudih on the west, Bhumij dominated) all the villages are dominated by the Kurmi Mahato.

The history of various ethnic groups' process of settling down in Kulabahal revealed that the forefathers of the present day Kurmi Mahato came to the village after the Mal, Bhumij and the Santal. The other groups closely followed each other and the last group to arrive was the Hill Kharia.

All the different ethnic groups, with the exception of two Dom families and the Hill Kharia, possess cultivable paddy land. The latter first settled on the *taur* land (high fallow land) of three rich Kurmi Mahatos of the village. Only a few years back they have been given the title deed of the land by the Government. The Mal (Muslim brass workers), Napit (barber), Karmakar (blacksmiths), Dom (drum-beaters) still practise their traditional occupations along with agriculture. The Tambuli are very enterprising and have given up their traditional occupation of trading in betel leaf. They have settled in the village nearly two decades before the Hill Kharia but are the most prosperous ethnic group. All the six families are engaged in business. Of late three members of the caste have entered into governmental jobs. In contrast the economic condition of the oldest three ethnic groups is gradually deteriorating. Faced by economic distress some of the Mal families have migrated to colliery fields near Dhanbad, Bihar, in search of better fortune. The economic condition of the Bhumij and the Santal has also been gradually declining. Some of the Bhumij and the Santal families have been reduced to near landless condition. Indeed, from the economic point of view except the Tambuli and the Mahato the economic condition of no other ethnic group is sound.

The Hill Kharia occupy the lowest position in the inter-ethnic hierarchic order of the region. The period of settlement of the Hill Kharia in the village is nearly 40 years old. The original village of the family which came first in Kulabahal was near

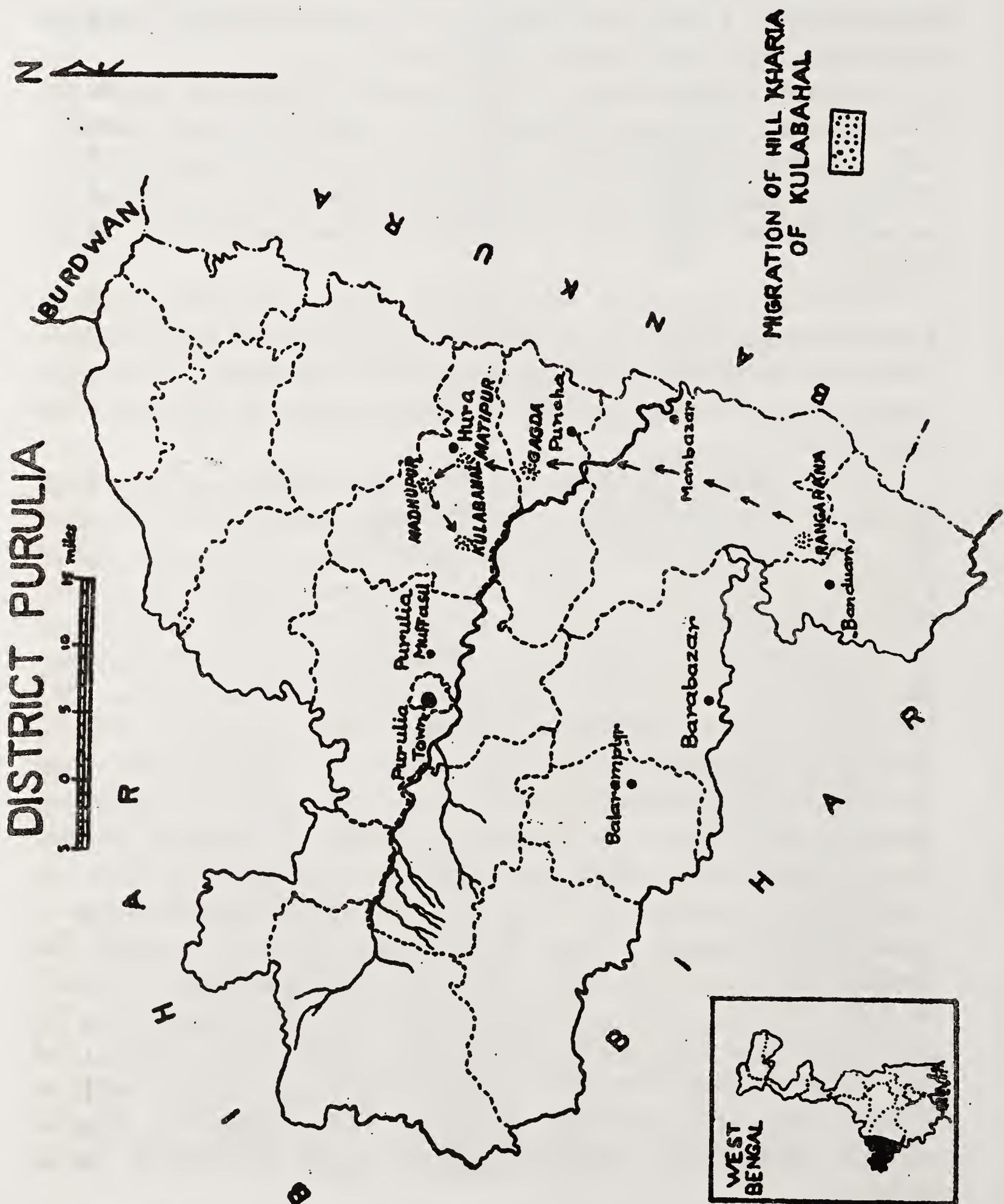


Table 1 : Population and ethnic groups in Kulabahal

Sl. No.	Ethnic group	No. of family	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Rajput	2	6	4	10	1.36
2	Tambuli	6	23	15	38	5.17
3	Napit	8	39	32	71	9.66
4	Mahato	70	180	183	363	49.39
5	Bhumij	10	21	21	42	5.71
6	Karmakar	3	10	11	21	2.86
7	Dom	2	5	4	9	1.22
8	Santal	14	31	30	61	8.30
9	Mal	4	15	6	21	2.86
10	Hill Kharia	24	50	49	99	13.47
Total		143	380	355	735	100

Rangarana village (*see* Map), Manbazar police station, situated close to the border of Bundwan police station. From Rangarana Pausa Sabar and his father Lilu and uncle Mahindi Sabar came to Gagda, a small village in Puncha police station on the bank of the river Kangsabati in search of food. From there Lilu and his family moved to Matipur in Hura police station about 18 km. away from Gagda. From Matipur the family again moved to Madhupur where from they finally settled down in Kulabahal village. It was at Kulabahal that the Pausa's descendants first started working as agricultural labourer. Before this Pausa and his father never worked as agriculture labourer. They lived mainly on hunting and gathering of forest products. Pausa's four sons who are now living in Kulabahal, first started working as agricultural labourer.

The forest which for so long sheltered the Hill Kharia has more or less been destroyed by the peasants' insistent demand for firewood and large scale use of it as grazing ground for all types of livestock. And because of the nature of the rugged lateritic land and poor socio-economic condition of the region, the total absorption of the Hill Kharia as agricultural labourer has not been possible. The soil is not very fertile. The undulating topography makes irrigation difficult and gushing rain water during rainy season washes most of the thin top soil. The poor return from the soil does not facilitate the existence of a class of landed gentry like in other parts of Bengal. Barring a few rich landholders, most of the peasants cultivate their land by their own hand. Therefore, need for agricultural labour is kept to a minimum.

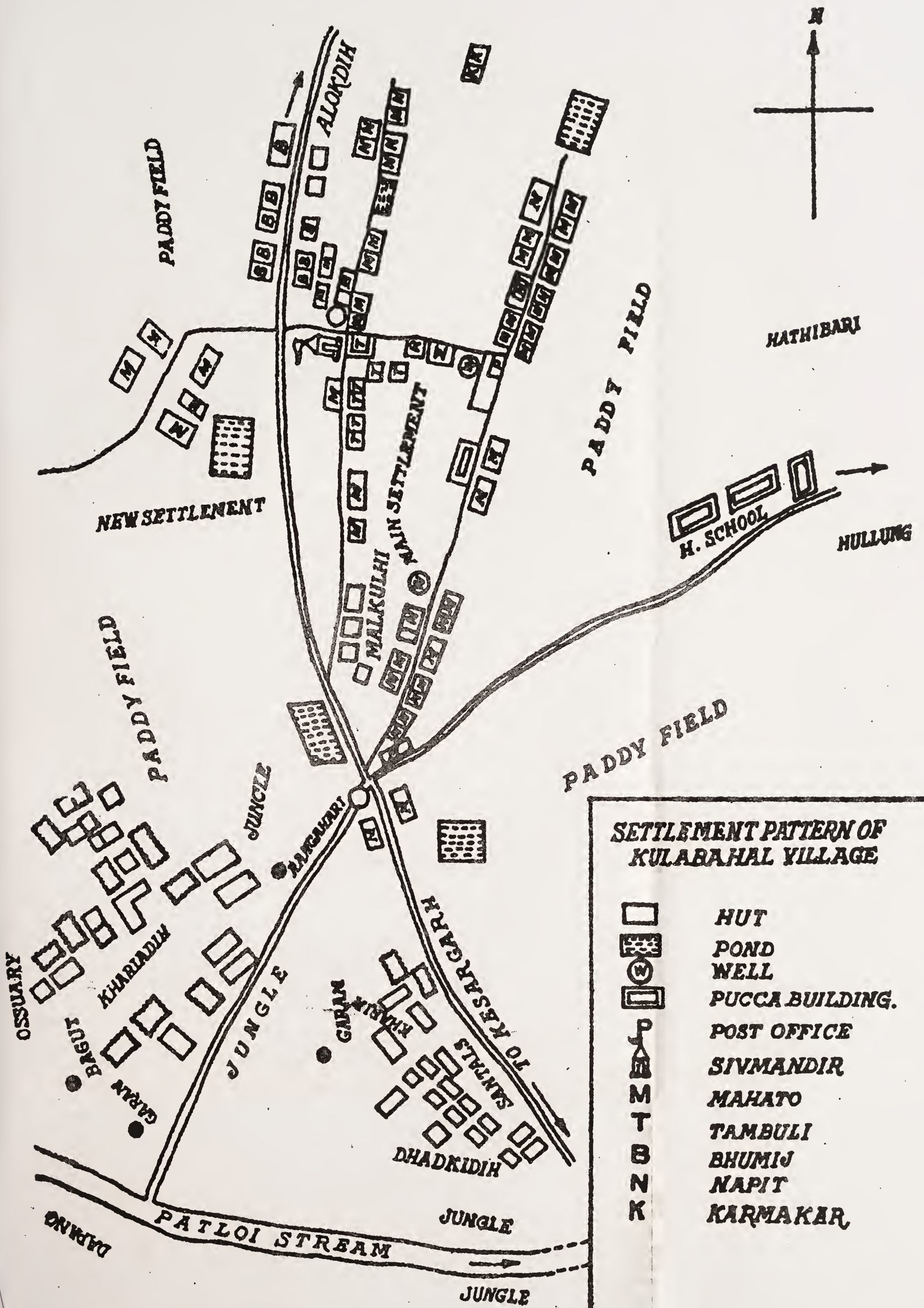
All the 24 Hill Kharia families of Kulabahal do not live in a single hamlet (see Map). Instead they are scattered in two hamlets separated by a stretch of forest land. The smaller of the two hamlets is situated near the Santal hamlet Dhadkidih. In this hamlet only four families live. The main concentration of the Hill Kharia (20 families) is found in the hamlet situated at the south-west corner of the main village about 300 yards away. The hamlet is referred to by other ethnic groups living in the village as Khariadih (hamlet of the Kharia) but to the Kharia themselves it has got a distinct name, Mayuripotha. In the past the hamlet was separated from the main village by a dense forest but now only by a stretch of land covered by some occasional thin shrubs.

Nearly seven years ago the Tribal Welfare Department of the West Bengal Government built 22 one-roomed tile-covered big huts for the Hill Kharia. However, the Government constructed huts, with a few exceptions, have been replaced by smaller huts. The tiles, the wooden beams supporting the roofs, etc., having been sold one by one by the inhabitants when they found no other means to procure food.

The traditional huts of the Kharia are known as *kumba*, conical shaped leave covered hut. But now-a-days they live in small wattle-walled huts, the roofs insufficiently covered by straw and leaves. Inside the hut they keep their few material belongings. Every hut has inside it one oven, one or two string cots (made out of natural creepers), a few earthen pots (*tilai*) and aluminium plates, one *gang* (rain cover made out of *chihar* or *Bauhinia* leaves), a few tattered clothes (*chenga*), one metal axe, one multiple digging stick (*khandi*), the distinctive weapon of the Hill Kharia and a pair of scythe.

Another interesting feature of the Hill Kharia huts is the presence of *tulsi pinra*. Normally it is an elevated earth platform with *tulsi* (*Basilium sanctum*) plants. This trait may be traced to Vaisnava influence in the district (Sinha 1966). But in the Hill Kharia huts the *tulsi pinra* has become a symbolic element with smooth and hard surface at the top having no trace of *Basilium sanctum* plants which are invariably present in the peasant households. The Hill Kharia regard it as a seat of deities where they sacrifice fowl on the occasion of *Magh puja* or *akhan jatra*.

Apart from *tulsi pinra* there are sacred groves around the Kharia hamlet. On the southern end of the hamlet there are three sacred groves—*Garam*, *Baghut* and *Bisaichandi*. A little further away on the southern end *muragarha* or the ossuary of the Hill Kharia is also visible. On the northern end of the hamlet another seat of deity, *Rangahari*, is situated.



Sketch map of settlement pattern of Kulabahal Village

The *Garam* or the village deity which is worshipped by all the ethnic groups, except the Hill Kharia, is situated on the northern end of the Santal hamlet. Besides this, within the village there is one *Siva mandir* and one *Saraswati mela*. These are the two Hindu deities worshipped regularly in the village. For this they are served by one Bramhin priest of Punchadih village, 5 km. away on the northern side.

There are altogether four wells within the main settlement. The Hill Kharia do not get their water from these wells. They depend on a naturally occurring permanent water hole near their hamlet for their water supply. Besides this, in 1974 the Tribal Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal dug a well near the Kharia hamlet but during summer months this well becomes dry.

The village has one high school on the eastern side near the border of Hullung village. It has also a hostel for students coming from far off places. The Hill Kharia do not send their children to this school because of their natural shyness to mix with outsiders. Recently taking advantage of a government policy to grant priority in according special recognition to the schools organised among the tribal communities three educated boys of the village are trying to establish a primary school in the Hill Kharia hamlet. Although their efforts have not been rewarded with government's recognition they have been successful in making the Hill Kharia parents recognize the value of education in coping with the outside world. They have successfully taught a few boys the Bengali alphabets and numerals within the past three years. Their only complaint is that they seldom get the boys in the school. They either go out as goat herders (*bagal*) in the peasant households or remain busy in quest of food to fill up their hungry young bellies.

The Pattern of Economy

THE FIGHT TO EXTRACT A LIVING

Purely simple food gathering and hunting Hill Kharia community did not exist in Manbhum district even in the beginning of this century (Coupland 1911). In Purulia now-a-days the situation has become more difficult for the Hill Kharia. In most of the places their basis of economic anchorage, *i.e.*, the forest has become non-existent or reduced to such an extent that food resources from the forest have become severely scarce. If we examine Table 2 it will be evident that the Hill Kharia combine a variety of activities to procure their minimum requirement of food. While hunting and gathering continue to provide some food items, agriculture has become their second anchorage point. In some places, like villages Gagda and Babuijor, where the receding forests no longer provide any food, a number of ways are combined together to sustain life. For example, in Gagda, along with agriculture labour, fishing from the Kangsabati river and selling fishes in the nearby villages is one of the ways adopted by the local Hill Kharia. In Babuijor the Kharia depend on selling firewood (which they get from the new forest grown by the Government) to the peasants in the villages and also in the weekly markets.

In Kulabahal village the Hill Kharia are participating in agriculture only for the last two and half decades. Nevertheless out of various kinds of agricultural activities, only in transplantation of rice seedlings and in harvesting, they are called upon to participate. They do not possess ploughs and bullocks. Therefore, they are not hired for the work of ploughing. These activities provide them employment for only 40 days at the most in a year. For the rest of the year during the period starting from the end of *Aghrayan* (Nov.-Dec.) to the beginning of *Magh* (Jan.-Feb.) they rely mostly on collecting paddy from the rat holes (in the burrows made by *Rattus rattus* in agricultural fields, paddy stalks are stacked compactly. Sometimes the quantity of paddy reaches upto 4—5 kg. in one burrow). A “catchment

territory" (Hassan 1975) of about 9 km. around Kulabahal is exploited for collecting *indur dhan* (paddy from rat holes), roots and tubers and hunting snakes, lizards, etc. The Hill Kharia pointed out that now-a-days *indur dhan* is collected by all communities hence their share is getting less day by day. But their only solace is that their method of collection by digging stick is more efficient.

Collection of *indur dhan* and hunting snakes and lizards are usually done by men. During *indur dhan* collection people usually go out individually with their digging sticks and collection bags. In choosing directions men usually try to avoid the path taken by the other brethren. A day's forage sometimes yields as large as 8–10 kg. of paddy. Occasionally from the paddy holes snails, *dhaman* snakes (rat snake *Ptyas mucosus*) and rats are also collected.

During hunting snakes, occasionally two or three men join together. When this is done the collection is equally divided. The skin of the snake is sold to men of the Muslim and the Muchi (cobbler) caste who visit their hamlet for this purpose. The proceed of the transaction is also equally divided among the participants. A snake skin having width of 5½" fetches about 5 rupees, whereas for a 3" skin Rupee 1 is offered. When the Hill Kharia find that the price offered is not remunerative they stop selling it and eat the skin along with the meat.

Apart from agricultural labour, cultivating *bajra* in a small plot of garden land, collection of *indur dhan*, roots and tubers, hunting snakes, birds, etc., the other sources of income are selling handicraft such as broomsticks, fish-traps made from bamboo, collection and selling firewood, *biri* leaves, *sal* leaves, to the peasants in the villages or directly in weekly markets. In the villages peasants mostly pay in kind, i.e., in paddy or *kodo* (Kodo millet, *Paspalum scroleiculatum*). One broomstick of bamboo fetches Rupees 1.50 to 2 in cash or its equivalent in kind, a fish-trap from Rs. 2.50 to 3. In the past people used to get bamboo from the forest. The Hill Kharia of Laraidungri village still procure the required quantity of bamboo from the forest. In Kulabahal people buy bamboo from the village. One big size, good quality bamboo costs Rupees 2. Generally from one big size bamboo either four to five broomsticks or three fish-traps can be produced. It requires equal participation of husband and wife. Assuming that they get the highest price for their produce the per capita income from selling broomsticks and fish-traps work out to 91 paise and Rupees 1.25 respectively. A head load of wood sells at Rs. 3. From middle of *Baisakh* (April-May) to middle of *Jaistha* (May-June) leaves of *kend* (*Melanoxylon*) are collected. For every hundred leaves of *kend* fifty paise can be had. Leaves of *sal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) are also sold

Table 2 : Year-round economic activity

Kind of activity	Magh Jan.-Feb.	Falgun Feb.-March	Chaitra March-April	Baisakh April-May	Jaistha May-June
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Gathering and Foraging	Collection of paddy from the rat holes during the first part of the month. Roots, resins & fruits, <i>sak</i> , collecting, Collecting and selling head load of wood	Roots and resins. Collecting and selling head load of woods, <i>sak</i> , <i>sal</i> leaves	Fruits, roots, <i>kend</i> leaves, <i>sal</i> leaves, honey (problematic). Collecting and selling head load of wood, <i>Sak</i> , insects	Fruits, <i>kend</i> -leaves <i>sak</i> . Honey (problematic). Collecting and selling head loads of wood	<i>Kend</i> leaves, <i>sal</i> leaves, <i>sak</i> . Collecting and selling head load of woods
Hunting	Hare, rats, fox (occasionally), wolves (rarely). <i>Hural</i> (rarely)	Hare, rats, squirrel, <i>udbiral</i>	Hunting birds	Hunting birds, <i>dhaman</i> snake (occasionally)	Hunting birds, <i>dhaman</i> snake (occasionally)
Agriculture and Manual Labour	—	—	—	—	Loan of paddy from the peasant as advanced wage of transplantation (2 kg. per wage)
Selling Handicrafts	Broomsticks (made of bamboo, grass, palm leaves)	Broomstick	Broomstick	Broomstick fish-traps	Broomstick fish-traps

of the Hill Kharia of Kulābahal

Asad June-July (7)	Shravan July-August (8)	Bhadra Aug.-Sept. (9)	Aswin Sept-Oct. (10)	Kartik Oct.-Nov. (11)	Ashvayan Nov.-Dec. (12)	Pausa Dec.-Jan. (13)
Sak. Cer- tain kinds of insects	Sak. Cer- tain kinds of insects	Roots, and tubers, sak, kukri (wild grass seed), selling sa/ insects and leaves	Roots & tubers, sak, insects and leaves	Roots, sak. Selling sa/ leaves, wood, etc.	Collecting paddy from rat holes (occasi- onally), Snails, leaves	Collecting paddy from rat holes, snails, leaves, fruits, roots, resins
Goi, dhaman frequently	Goi, dhaman frequently, fish, crabs, (by chil- dren), frogs	Goi, dha- man fish, crabs, frogs, snails	Goi, dha- man, fish, crabs, snails, frogs. Hare (occasio- nally)	Goi, dha- man (occas- ionally), rats fish, crabs, snails. Hare (occasio- nally)	Hare (occa- sionally), rats	Hare, rats
Loan of paddy as advanced wage, Wage-lab- our (occa- sionally)	Wage- labour (occa- sionally)	Transplan- tation of seedlings (1.5 kg. of rice per wage), cultivating millet in homestead lands	—	Mud plast- ering of peasants' huts	Harvesting paddy on contract, threshing	Harvesting paddy, threshing, reaping millet, gardenings, etc.
—	—	Broomstick, fish-traps	Broom- stick	Broomstick, fish-traps	Broom- stick	—

regularly to the village shop owners by a few widows. Occasionally during marriage or other social ceremonies villagers ask them to make leaf plates. For a hundred leaf plates they are paid one rupee.

Although all these occupations might seem enough to ward off the hunger which stalks them at every step, in actuality this remains a far cry. Because, of the products of all the occupations stated above, only for broomstick and fish-traps there is a regular demand. But fashioning broomstick and fish-trap is a painstaking job. It requires, as pointed out above, at least 3-4 days gestation period from buying bamboo and making the objects. Demand for the other things has an uncertain ebb and flow.

As far as food supply is concerned it was found that out of twelve months, for seven months from *Magh* to *Jaistha* (Feb.-June) and *Bhadra-Aswin* (Sept.-Oct.) the food supply remains erratic and uncertain, causing periodic starvation for days on end. The months of *Bhadra-Aswin*, occasionally extending upto *Kartick* (Oct.-Nov.), are the leanest period. During this time the Hill Kharia depend on 4 kinds of roots and tubers, 5 kinds of leaf vegetables (*sak*), seeds of wild grass that grow on the high lands (*kukri*) and hunt games. Hunting snakes and lizards (*goi*) becomes difficult because of the standing crop in the field. To stave off hunger they were found to give their children a gruel made from chaff of paddy discarded by the peasants.

During the months of *Baisak-Jaistha* (April-June) apart from selling wood, and broomsticks, a part of the wage for rice transplantation to be done during the months of *Asad-Sravan* (June—August) for the peasants is taken in advance. For rice transplantation a labourer is paid two kilograms of paddy and six *pua* (local measure equivalent to approximately 1.5 kg.) or fifteen hundred grams of rice. Two kilograms of paddy are taken in advance for tiding over summer lean months. All the 23 families without exception had to spread thin their earnings this way for mere survival. Table 3 gives detail break up of family wise advance wage taken by the Hill Kharia in the summer of 1977. From the table it will be seen that most families use up almost the entire half of the wage of a rice transplantation before the start of the season. Minimum number of part-wages taken by a single family is 11 while the maximum is 50. This is dependent on number of female labourers available in a family. Young girls aged between 10-15 are pressed into the job and the earning is utilised by her families. Five families (21.7%) could not repay the advance taken in the previous year.

How forest as source of food has become systematically depleted will be evident from Table 4. Although a large number of species is known to be edible in most of the places in Purulia, and in Kulabahal

in particular, most of these are not available now. In Kulabahal of the 21 varieties of roots and tubers that once formed part of the Hill Kharia's food only 7 are available. But even the supply of these roots is no longer profuse. Due to large scale denudation of forest, constant grazing of cattles of the surrounding peasantry and consequent leaching and erosion of the soil, the size of the roots is no longer as large as it used to be in the past. Honey and fruits once said to be profuse in the forest, have also now become more or less scarce. Some of my informants pointed out that honey at one time was available in plenty and availability of different varieties was used as a marker for different seasons. But now finding honey around Kulabahal is difficult. At one time during the summer season two fruits and one flower used to save the Hill Kharia from the hunger—Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*), *mabul* (*Bassia latifolia*) and *kul* (*Zizyphus jujuba*). But these trees are now rarely found.

Table 3 : Part of wage taken as advance loan by various Hill Kharia families of Kulabahal in pre-sowing season in 1977

Sl. No.	Name of the Family	Number of part wages taken as advance loan	Outstanding loan of previous year
1.	Bhim Sabar (2)	35	8
2.	Satrughan Sabar (1)	20	—
3.	Arjun Sabar (2)	22	—
4.	Sukumar Sabar (1)	30	3
5.	Lushu Sabar (1)	30	5
6.	Kunja Sabar (1)	33	—
7.	Nakul Sabar (2)	46	9
8.	Pelu Sabar (3)	50	—
9.	Sonatan Sabar (4)	39	—
10.	Judhisthir Sabar (1)	11	—
11.	Budhi Sabar (1)	16	—
12.	Sukumar Sabar (1)	20	—
13.	Amulya Sabar (1)	33	—
14.	Binod Sabar (1)	14	—
15.	Rathu Sabar (2)	38	—
16.	Prema Sabar (1)	24	4
17.	Sambhu Sabar (2)	30	—
18.	Banamali Sabar (1)	11	—
19.	Kala Sabar (1)	25	—
20.	Kartic Sabar (1)	15	—
21.	Kandra Sabar (1)	12	—
22.	Rabani Sabar (1)	20	—
23.	Bharat Sabar (1)	14	—

* Figures in the bracket indicate number of female labourers in the family. In transplantation female labourers only take part.

Availability of the games has also met the same fate (Table 4). Of the animals that are hunted two kinds of reptiles *dhaman* or rat snake and *goi* (*Varanus monitor*) now form the principal hunted animals. After these rats, birds, and hares occupy the respective order in their importance. Fox, jackal, squirrel, civet cat, *hural*, *udbiral*, etc., are also occasionally hunted. During rainy season and just after it fishes, crabs, frogs are caught from the overflowing streams and agricultural fields. Very often hares that are caught, are sold to the peasants in lieu of paddy. Fishes are also seldom consumed, they are sold.

Table 4 : Kharia's world of food

Sl. No.	Kind of edible	Total number of known edible species	Available in the region
1.	Roots & tubers	21	7
2.	Honey	3 types of honey	problematic
3.	Fruit	28	6
4.	Seed	4	1
5.	Resin	6	2(1)*
6.	Reptile	3	2
7.	<i>Sak</i> (leaves)	20	12
8.	Big animal	14	6(2) (carcass of big animals are also eaten)
9.	Insect	6	2
10.	Bird	37	10

Figures in the bracket indicate that the availability of the species have become problematical.

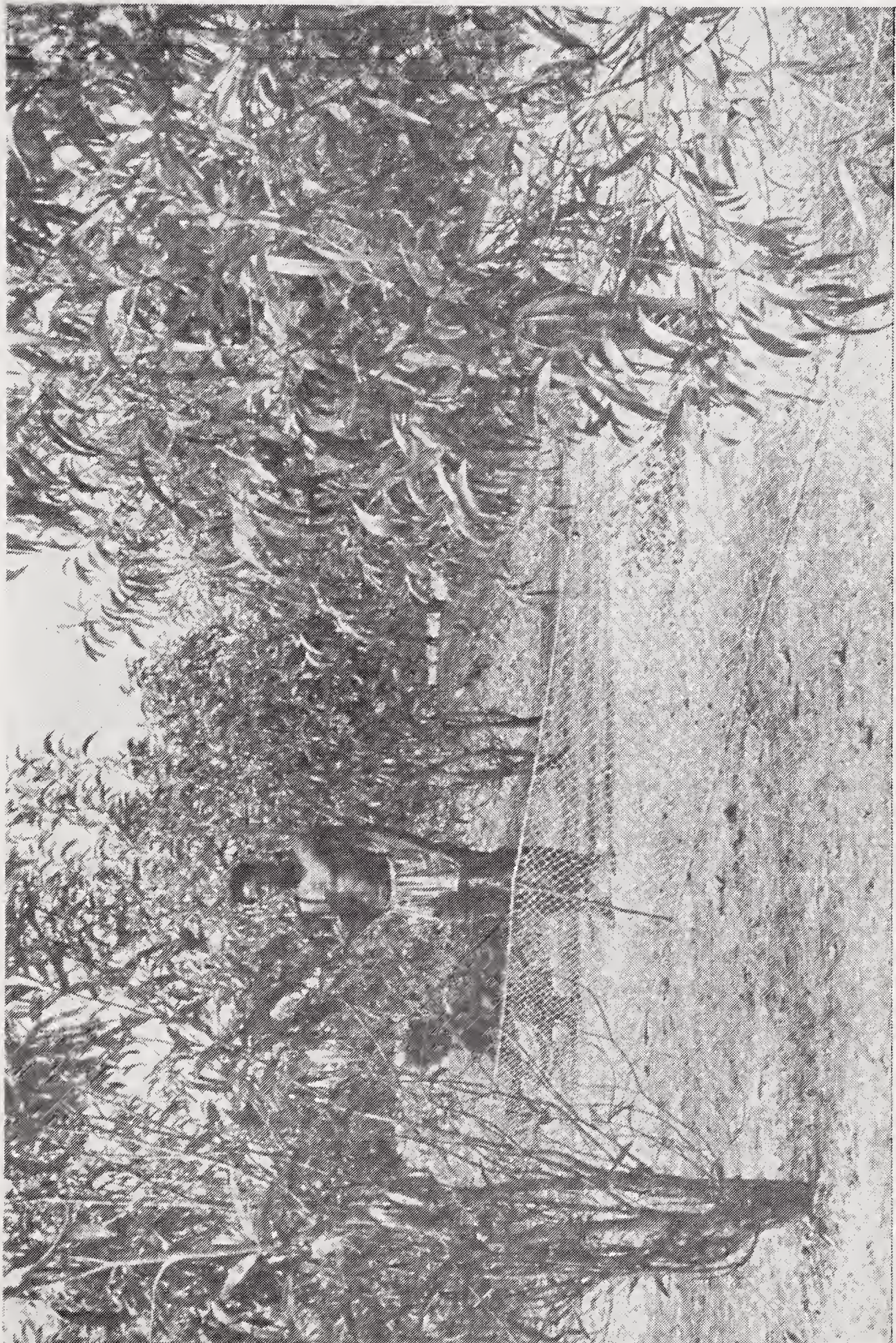
Table 5 : Inventory of the implements of the Kharia

Sl. No.	Kind of implements	Total no. of implement known	No. of implement in vogue
1.	Net	2 varieties	2(1)**
2.	Trap	9 varieties	9(4)
3.	Digging stick and one	2	2(all the families)
4.	Bow & arrow	1	Present but not used for hunting but for defence only

** Figures in the bracket indicate the number of families having the implements.

THE HILL KHARIA OF PURULIA
DIKSHIT SINHA

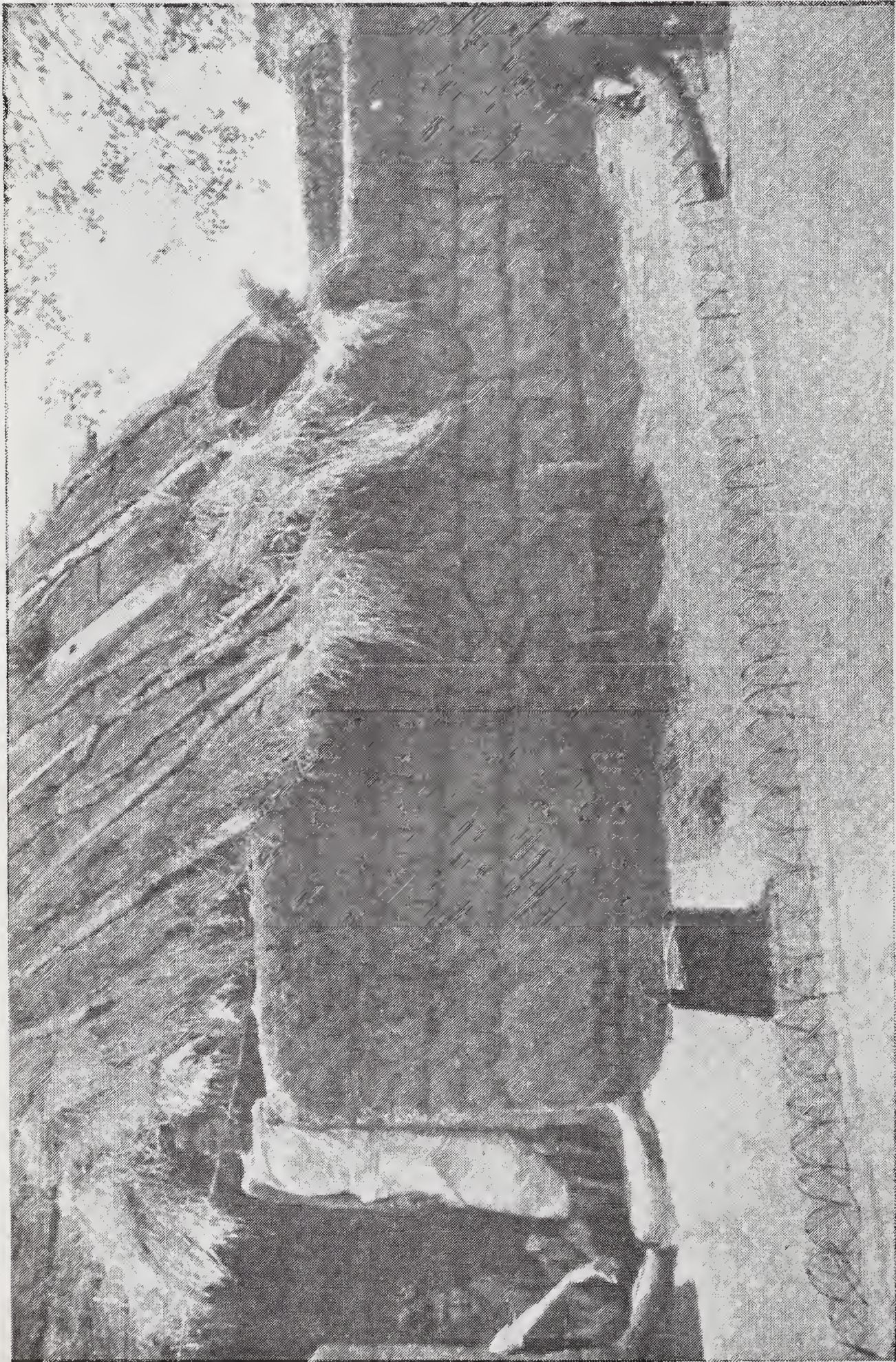
Plate 3



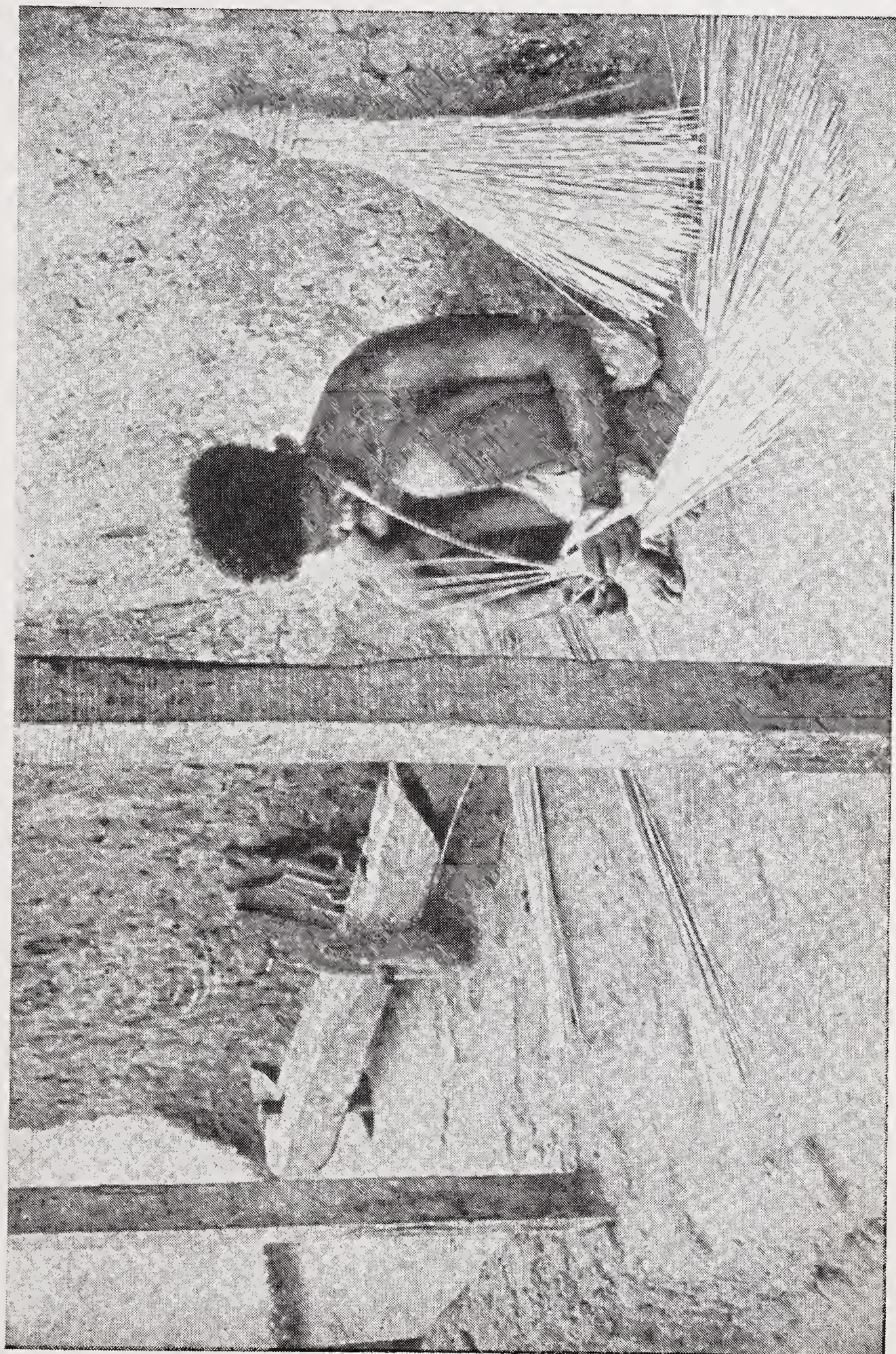
Net for trapping hare has been set

THE HILL KHARIA OF PURULIA
DIKSHIT SINHA

Plate 4



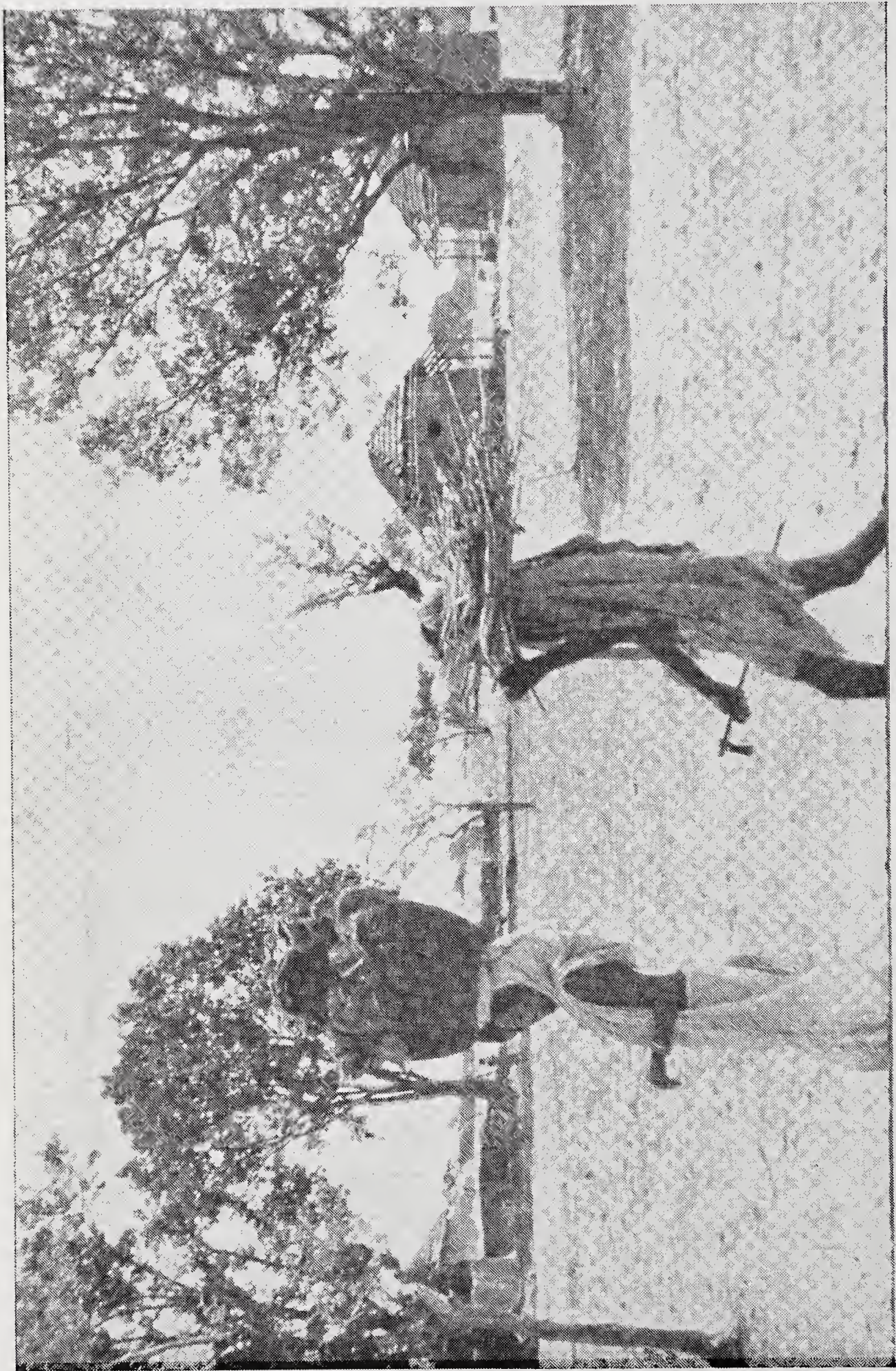
Demonstrating how to trap Panrka birds



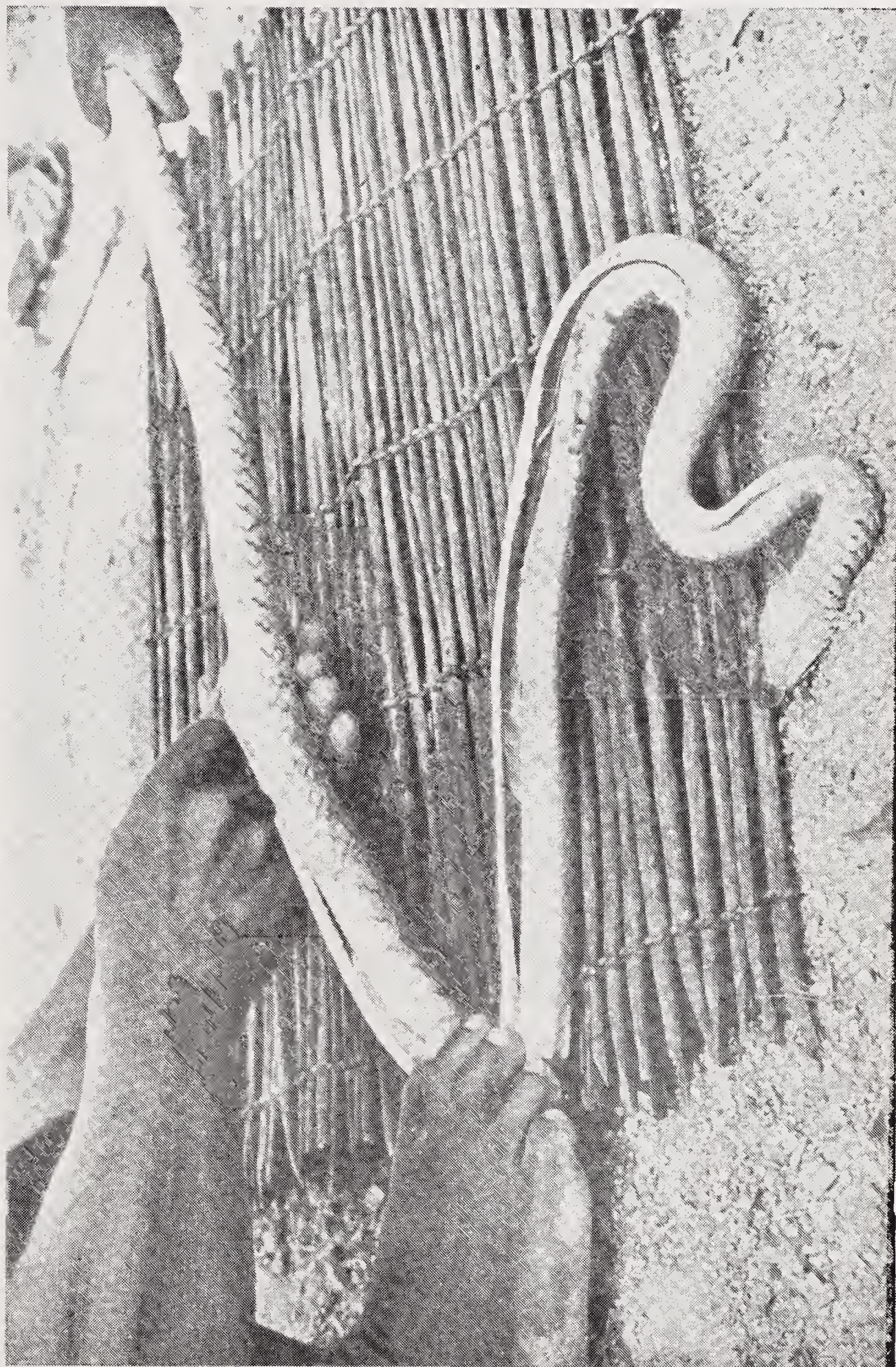
Arjun Sabar on his job of fashioning broomstick from bamboo

THE HILL KHARIA OF PURULIA
DIKSHIT SINHA

Plate 6



*A Hill Kharia young couple returning from the jungle in the summer
days after the days collection of kend leaves and fire-wood*



Dressing dhaman snake for dinner

Hunters of Africa are known, to eat carcass of dead animals (Turnbull 1961). From India we have no knowledge about this. S. C. Roy (1937) who worked among the Hill Kharia of Dhalbhum and Mayurbhanj districts strongly repudiated the contention that the Hill Kharia eat carcass of animals. I found among the Kharia of Kulabahal and other villages of Purulia great deal of pining for animals' flesh. They have a notion that because their forefathers used to subsist on flesh they were strong and had no disease. Consequently it was found that not only the Hill Kharia eat the carcass of wild animals that are occasionally found, they avidly seek out the carcass of cattle. But because this is looked down upon by other ethnic groups it is done very clandestinely.

Meat is most prized food but rice has become the staple food of the Hill Kharia. But often the procured quantity of rice is so little that people divide it into whole rice or *dhela bhat* or rice water (*mar*) for distribution among the family members. Children are given the larger share of the former while grown ups mix the *dhela bhat* with *mar* and eat it. Sometimes the quantity of rice prevent this and all members have rice mixed with *mar* water, the quantity of the latter being disproportionately large.

EROSION OF TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE OF ECOLOGY

With the depletion of forest the technological base has also eroded to a great extent as an examination of the Table 5 will prove. Bow and arrow as an implement has become non-existent except as a defensive weapon during doing duty as guard of peasants' village and crops, and as a toy of young boys. Use of nets and traps have also fallen off. Only four families have traps for catching various kinds of birds and only one family has nets for catching hares and cranes.

It is obvious that a people anchored to a particular mode of economy will have a relative degree of cognition of that world. How far the Hill Kharia have knowledge about their environment? This problem was examined by comparing the situation at Kulabahal with Laraidungri, one of a few Hill Kharia villages still nestled in the heart of the jungle in Patamda police station of Singhbhum district of Bihar. The notable feature of the knowledge about the jungle is that although in Kulabahal people belonging to the age group of 30-60 possess knowledge about the use of different species of plants, younger persons have very little knowledge about jungle. In contrast, in Laraidungri it was found that young people have relatively good knowledge about the forest environment. In Laraidungri altogether 507 different species were identified which are of some use to human being. Of these, as many as 124

species were identified as medicinal plants, 7 species as required for the magical purpose. In Kulabahal 367 plants were identified as usefull. Of these, only 67 were identified as medicinal plants, and only three plants useful for the magical purpose. Of even more interest is the use of these plants, particularly of medicinal plants by the people. For instance, in Kulabahal only 3 adult persons know about the use of these plants. But in Laraidungri most of the adult persons know about the use of the medicinal plants identified and frequently use them.

AGRICULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT OF YOUNG BOYS

Lee (1968) pointed out that the Kung Bushman were able to support their old parents. Young boys are not pressed to contribute their might in procuring food. From the description given above it is apparent that the Hill Kharia are gradually precipitating as landless agriculture labourers. But a Hill Kharia's participation in agriculture is not uniform throughout his span of life. From the age of 8-9, young Kharia boys are sent to the peasants' house as cow or goat herders (*bagal*). Although the convention is to employ the *bagal* in the month of *Magh* (Jan.-Feb.), on annual contract, this is seldom adhered to in the case of the Kharia boys. Instead their services are procured during the months of *Asad-Sravan* (June-Aug.) when all agricultural fields are taken over for cultivation and goats and cattles must be tended lest they destroy the paddy seedlings. For their service they are paid in paddy (maximum 3 mds.) and given two meals.

When boys are a little older and capable of handling tougher jobs like ploughing, manuring, etc., they are employed as field-cum-domestic servants (also called *bagal*). They perform all types of agricultural operation, threshing and husking paddy as well as some domestic chores. At present three such boys are working as full time *bagal*. One interesting fact about the Kharia *bagal* is that they leave this job as soon as they get married and establish their own households. They then revert back to an assorted occupation of hunting, gathering, handicraft and agricultural wage labour. During the past five years five middle aged persons have been employed as night guards, after a series of dacoities that happened in the village.

Unlike the relationship between the agricultural castes and low castes who usually supply the labour in other districts of West Bengal the relationship between the peasants and the Hill Hharia *bagal* is not an enduring one in Purulia. After the end of each year hard assessment is made of the return that one gets and if it is found that the peasant employer is deriving all the benefit without returning the amount promised, the relationship is terminated. It is not unlikely to find a Hill

Kharia boy changing his employer at the early part of the season complaining that his employer is driving him hard without any respite or that he is being kept half-fed.

WORK, FOOD AND LEISURE

Diary of ten families regarding their work, the source of food and leisure, etc., was maintained for a month during the lean period. During comparatively easy food supply situation diary of the same ten families was maintained for ten days. It was found that during the lean period, most of the days the families take food only once in a day. Even the quantity of food consumed is hardly sufficient to satisfy hunger. Periodic starvation was also recorded in all the families. During relatively easy time (Dec.-Jan.), however, they take food once in the morning and once in the evening. Table 6 gives the detail of two days' diary, one in the lean period and one in the non-lean period, of one family. The head of the family is employed by one section of the village as night guard and thus is relatively well off. On the day shown against lean period the family subsisted practically on roots and tubers the total weight of which was only 900 grams. These were boiled and eaten. Lack of food from the morning drives the children to search for food. They catch crabs by hands or small fish by rod and line or simply by hand. Whenever one or two fishes/crabs are caught they would run to their hut push it into the smouldering fire of the oven and pull it out almost immediately and eat it. After that they would again run for fresh catch. This running between hut and field goes on till late in the afternoon when they would crowd around their mothers and wait for the food that their parents have brought home.

During non-lean season children were found to be playing games and generally enjoying themselves. Although adult males had to work or forage for food, women had much more leisure time. It is also evident from the diary that food supply is much more comfortable at this time.

The gap between work and leisure has also considerably narrowed. Even during the days when they depended on gathering and hunting people had to work regularly for four to eight hours to get their food. The luxury of unalloyed leisure time enjoyed by various hunting and gathering societies in different parts of the world is seldom found among the Hill Kharia. From the previous description of the gathering and hunting activities it is apparent that these activities have become all the more laborious and time consuming. If they are found to be lolling around it is because from the despair of having been a failure in getting work or food.

Lean Period: 19.9.74

Table 6 : Diary of food-intake and work of one family

Name	Age & Relations	When food consumed			Work		Method of getting Food		Leisure
		Sakal	Basyam	Dupa-hara	Sanjha	Morning	After-noon	Evening	
1. Bhim Sabar	52(H)	Salted tea	—	x	—	—	—	—	At about 9 A.M. No. 1, 2, 3 went to jungle and came back at about 2 P.M. Thereafter No. 1 started working on the broomstick, No. 2 felt sick called No. 4 and asked her to collect grass(<i>jurgura</i>) for making broomstick No. 5, 6, 7 from about 11 A.M. went to the rice field to collect crabs and fish. As soon as one would collect one or two crabs/fish they would run home and half roast it and eat.
2. Kali Sabar	48(W)	"	—	—	Roots & tubers	—	—	—	
3. Putana	14(D)	"	—	—	"	—	—	—	
4. Sarathi	12(D)	"	—	—	"	—	—	—	
5. Sakti	8(D)	"	—	crabs & fish	"	—	—	—	
6. Dasarath	6(S))	"	—	"	"	—	—	—	
7. Thkurmni	4(S)	"	—	"	"	—	—	—	
<u>Non-Lean Period: 17.12.74</u>									
2.		Salted tea	Rice & mar of 1 kg. rice divided	x	2 kg. rice divided among members + 3 rats	—	—	—	No. 1 went out at about 12 o'clock to collect <i>Indur dhan</i> . No. 2 did some house work in the morning. No. 3 did domestic chores. No. 4, 5, 6, 7 played. No. 1, 2, 3, 4 slept in the afternoon
3.		"	"	"	"	—	—	—	
4.		"	"	"	"	—	—	—	
5.		"	"	"	"	—	—	—	
6.		"	"	"	"	—	—	—	
7.		"	"	"	"	—	—	—	

Sakal = Early morning, Basyam = Mid morning, Dupahara = Afternoon, Sanjha = Evening.

INDEBTEDNESS

The Hill Kharia usually incur loans at two difficult periods in a year—summer (April-May) and in post-monsoon seasons (Sept.-Oct). As described earlier during summer they try to tide over the period by taking part of their wage of transplanting paddy seedlings as advance. In post-monsoon period they borrow at a usurious rate of interest, money, paddy, rice, *kodo*, etc., that a peasant is willing to give them as loan. As a convention they had to pay interest at the rate of 50% for paddy, 100% for rice. In lieu of *kodo* equal amount of paddy is demanded which work up to nearly 100% as interest. While paying back cash money it is usually converted to rice. The rate of conversion of rupees to rice is usually dictated by the usurer and varies from season to season. Thus in 1974 during Sept.-Oct. the cost of one kg. of rice was about Rupees 2. But when giving loan creditors stipulate that at the time of paying back the conversion rate of one rupee will be equal to 4 kg. of rice. Thus while one rupee fetched at the time of taking loan only half kg. of rice at the time of payment he would have to give 700% interest on the cash loan incurred. Table 7 gives detail break up of loan incurred by Hill Kharia families in the year 1977. From the above table it is apparent that the Tambuli and Kurmi Mahato ethnic groups take leading role as creditors. But the most interesting point is that of the role played by Hill Kharia families as creditors. Two brothers, Sanatan and Sambhu gave paddy to their relatives as loan on 50% interest. Although the role of creditors was not consistently played in subsequent years for want of capitals it shed some interesting light on interpersonal relation among the tribe which we will have occasion to discuss later on. Both of them said that they could not ward off the request of their relatives for food because they know that they had paddy with them. Therefore, they had to give them paddy as loan to be returned along with interest.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION AS PERCEIVED BY THE HILL KHARIA

So far we have been discussing the ways by which the Hill Kharia adjust to a limiting situation where they are hard pressed to get their subsistence. Anthropologists are of the view that notion about a society's material needs are culturally conditioned. Sahlins (1968) showed that there are two different kinds of attitude to the material existence: (1) To limit one's desire to whatever is available and enjoy material plenty with a low standard of living. (2) To have ever increasing degree of desire and make an effort to reach this by increasing productivity. The former condition is perhaps only possible where a community's resources are left undisturbed and not encroached by other

Table 7 : Indebtedness of the Hill Kharia families of Nulabahal

Sl. No.	Name of the Debtor	Kinds of loans					Mile (in kg)	Number of creditors and their caste/ community	Village of the creditor
		Cash (in Rupee)	Paddy (in kg.)	Rice (in kg.)	Wheat (in kg.)	Kode (in kg.)			
1.	Rupa Sabar	4.50	—	—	—	—	—	1 K.M.	Kulabahal
2.	Judisthir Sabar	15.00	—	—	—	—	—	1 K.M., 1 T	"
3.	Bhim Sabar	61.00	154	8	—	7	—	10 K.M., 2 T, 1 H.K.	"
4.	Budhi Sabar	1.00	80	1	—	—	—	2 K.M., 1 B	"
5.	Bharat Sabar	13.00	—	—	—	5	—	1 K.M., 1 T	"
6.	Nakul Sabar	20.00	44	2	—	8	—	2 T, 1 K.M., 1 R	"
7.	Arjun Sabar	41.50	83	6	—	12	3	13 K.M., 2 T, 1 H.K.	"
8.	Rathu Sabar	40.00	100	—	—	—	—	3 K.M., 2 T, 1 R.	"
9.	Binod Sabar	25.00	20	—	—	—	—	2 K.M.,	"
10.	Prema Sabar	5.00	5	—	—	—	—	1 K.M.,	"
11.	Kunja Sabar	8.50	92	1	—	10	—	3 K.M., 2 H. K., 1 T	"
12.	Sukumar Sabar	23.00	25	2	—	10	—	3 K.M., 1 H.K., 3 T	"
13.	Amulya Sabar	3.00	85	—	—	6	—	1 B, 2 K.M., 1 R	"
14.	Lushu Sabar	27.00	10	—	—	3	—	2 T, 1 K.M.	"
15.	Pelu Sabar	40.50	90	—	—	10	—	6 K.M., 1 R, 2 T	"
16.	Kala Sabar	33.00	50	4	1	10	—	4 K.M., 1 T	"
17.	Mangal Sabar	—	15	—	1	—	—	1 K.M., 1 T Dapang & Kulabahal	"
18.	Sanatan Sabar	14.00	75	—	—	—	—	2 K.M.,	"
19.	Rabani Sabar	1.00	30	—	—	—	—	1 K.M.	"
20.	Satrughan Sabar	5.00	10	—	—	—	—	2 K.M.	"
21.	Sambhu Sabar	10.00	45	—	—	—	—	2 K.M.	"
22.	Daman Sabar	8.00	49	—	—	—	—	4 K.M.	Madandih
23.	Banamali Sabar	7.00	10	1	—	—	—	3 K.M.	Kulabahal
24.	Kartick Sabar	12.00	30	—	—	5	—	2 K.M., 1 T	"

K. M. = Kurmi Mahato, T = Tambuli, R = Rajput, H.K = Hill Kharia, B = Bhumij.

ethnic groups. The Hill Kharia live, as it is evident from the above description, surrounded by other ethnic groups. They have no control over the ecological resources. The Hill Kharia were first dislodged from their niche when the governments' forest regulation prevented them from carrying on the practice of shifting cultivation. Again within a century they have been driven out of their chosen mode of economy by large scale denudation of forest. Against this background it is interesting to see how the Hill Kharia themselves view their own economic condition. Some of the informants pointed out that even thirty or forty years ago they had comparatively much more easy economic situation. Arjun Sabar described the past economic condition in the following way :

We did not normally take much rice like we do now. Meat, roots and tubers and honey were our principal food then. When we used to feel like taking rice we would barter meat or honey for rice.

At that time jungles used to be full of lac and silk cocoons. One measure of lac used to fetch four times its equal amount of paddy.

Now-a-days the summer season is one of our most difficult time. But in the past apart from honey and roots there were abundant *har* (*Banyan*), *kul* (*Zizyphus*) and *mohua* (*Basia latifolia*) trees. One fruit from each tree would have satiated one's hunger. The jungle was full of *mohua* trees. We could not only eat *mohua* as much as we liked during summer but also could collect and preserve it for the months of *Bhadra-Aswin*.

Why this situation has occurred ? Most common rationalization for economic deprivation is that of falling off from the supernatural grace. Indeed one story describes how the Hill Kharia used to lead a happy life which was destroyed due to misfortune :

Everyday in the morning one winnowing fan used to be placed at the door of a deity who used to live in a cave high on the mountain top. Just before dusk it used to be taken back and lo ! it was full of food. But the happy days ended when the Santal polluted the fan by touching it. The deity became angry and the door of the cave was closed forever and from that day onwards the misery of the Kharia started.

That the Hill Kharia have fallen off from the grace of supernatural is also evident from other stories. It is believed that the Hill Kharia were blessed by supernatural power in the past. Even tigers, a ferocious animal, used to do no harm to them. Instead they used to protect them and if anyone would lose direction while walking through the jungle, the spirit of the tiger used to help them out of the jungle. To this day the

spirit of the tiger (*Baghut*) is an object of veneration of the Hill Kharia. But now it is pointed out that, instances are not rare when tiger has devoured a Hill Kharia. All these lead the Hill Kharia to believe that their plight is ordained by the supernatural. The point to be noted is that they think that the desecration of the nature has gone to such an extent that the nature is no longer bountiful, as if, she has turned back her face in anger from the Hill Kharia.

With the depletion of forest and gradual shift in occupation from gathering and hunting to agricultural labour, the Hill Kharia now regard agricultural land as the most desirable thing to possess. This has generated a conception of relative deprivation among the Hill Kharia, relative to the surrounding peasantry. The Hill Kharia, see peasants as not only possessing land but also have much *riz* (merriment). Their poverty-stricken condition in contrast seldom provides any occasion for enjoyment.

Poverty and Social Relationship

In the previous chapter we described how the Hill Kharia find themselves in a precarious economic situation where neither their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering nor their effort to extract a living wage from the agricultural system has been able to meet the desired amount of their basic requirements. In this chapter we will delineate the consequence of the economic strain and deprivation on the social institutions of the Hill Kharia. In doing this we will not go into the ethnographic detail of the Hill Kharia society. We will deal with the salient aspects of the social institutions that appear to be affected by economic deprivation.

However, it may be pointed out at the very outset that it is very difficult to pin-point how far deprivation has affected the social institutions among the hunting and gathering Hill Kharia mainly because of the nature of the hunting and gathering societies in mainland India. The "secondarily primitivized" (Sinha 1969) state of hunting and gathering societies of the Indian mainland precludes a straightforward comparative approach. The effect of secondary primitivization on the social structure of the hunting and gathering tribes of Indian mainland has not been studied. And research on the social structure of the Indian hunting and gathering societies has not reached a stage where useful generalization about their way of life can be safely made. The problem is made all the more difficult by long period of acculturation that must have taken place due to prolonged contact with caste societies.

The ethnographic data on the Hill Kharia found in Roy's monograph (1937) is not exhaustive. In any case, it was primarily gathered from Mayurbhanj. Present evidence suggests that the Hill Kharia of Mayurbhanj differs in some important respect from the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Therefore, comparison with Roy's data was not feasible.

In studying the effect of poverty on the Hill Kharia of Purulia first of all data on the institutional aspects were collected by narrative method (ideal pattern). Those were then studied in the process of actualization. Any deviation noticed between the ideal and the

operational pattern was then further pursued. The reason for deviation was noted down. Minor variation between the ideal and operational pattern was omitted because of the legitimate fluctuation in the process of actualization noted by anthropologist (Bhattacharya 1967). But we assumed that when there is a significant omission of certain aspect of a ritual it may be due to causes other than the usual gap noticed between ideal and operational pattern.

Obviously, the method described above is not at all applicable when dealing with interpersonal relationship. We tried to document the interpersonal relationship found within family and between certain other observable categories of kin. In describing the human societies some anthropologists (Malinowski 1932, Mauss 1954, Levi-Strauss 1963) noted that the fundamental basis of all societies, especially preliterate communities, has been "reciprocal relationship". We followed this guide line and examined how far in an impoverished situation reciprocal relationships within the community as well as outside the community have been affected.

KINSHIP

We pointed out in Chapter 2 that in Kulabahal the Hill Kharia live in two separate hamlets. The inhabitants of these hamlets who trace their descent patrilineally, belong to a single clan, Bhuia mach, but are divided into three separate *bangsha* or lineages (see Fig. 1). Thus, the clans among the Hill Kharia are divided into numerous *bangsha*. These are only three generational in depth. Marriage between these affinally or consanguinally related *bangsha* is prohibited. S. C. Roy (1937) pointed out that although marriage within one's own clan was stated to be prohibited, that remained a notion only. In Purulia it is found that while negotiating for marriage alliance care is taken to eliminate the possibility of the prospective groom or bride being direct descendent of one's own *bangsha* (patrilineage) or that of the FS, MS, MB. and FMB *bangsha*.

To obviate the possibility of an undesirable match which might draw the wrath of the supernatural deity, the Hill Kharia have a unique custom called *khatabara*. The day after marriage is over and when the bride and the groom start for the village of the groom, both of them are made to stand facing each other. The bride's hand is placed on the groom's hand, both their palms facing upward and fingers spread apart. The fathers of the bride and the groom bring out two arrow shafts and pass them through the gap of middle and fourth fingers of the bride and the groom from below. Then the two arrows are exchanged. After this the supernatural deity is invoked to witness the union and if

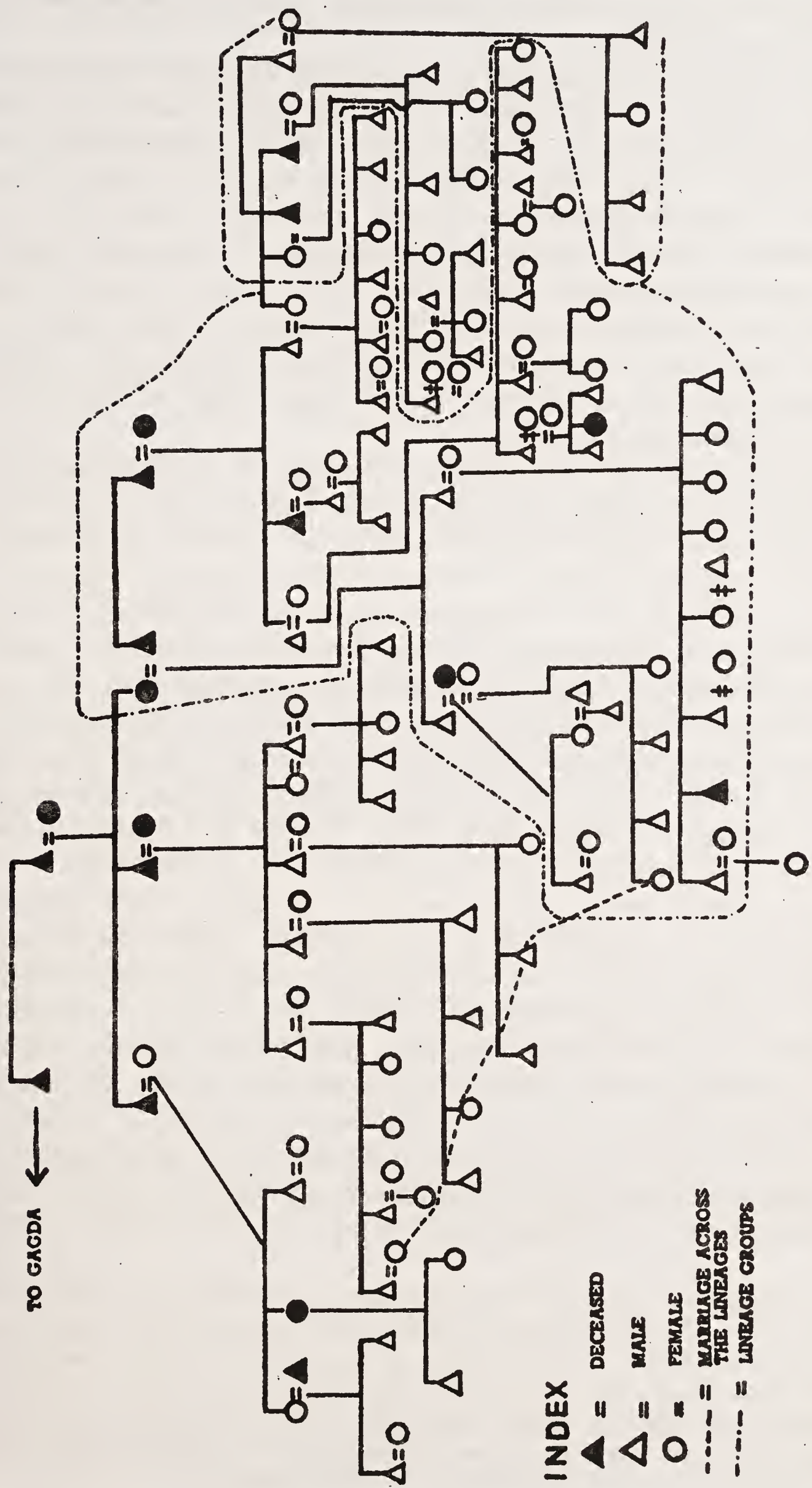


Fig. 1 : Kinship relationship of Hill Kharias living in Kulabahal village.
(only members who are living in the village have been shown)

the match is not lawful, the deity is enjoined to show its disapproval by breaking a tree's branch.

There seems to be a great deal of controversy regarding the number of clans among the Hill Kharia. S. C. Roy (*ibid.*) found only two clans among the Hill Kharia of Mayurbhanj. He also noted that in an earlier work T. C. Das (1931) recorded the presence of six clans. We recorded as many as eighteen clan names*. Of these ten clans have as their prefix or suffix the term Bhuia which suggests that these clans might have originated by a process of drift (Fox 1967). But it could not be found out as to which were the parent clans. Unlike the other tribes of the region such as the Santal, the Hill Kharia have no clear idea about the structural features of their own society. Even some of the names of the clan totems are not known.

S. C. Roy described the kinship terminology of the Hill Kharia as classificatory (1937 : 147). He was of the opinion that along with Dudh and Dhelki Kharia the Hill Kharia too practised cross-cousin marriage. The Hill Kharia of Purulia and the contiguous districts of Bankura, Midnapur and Singhbhum now-a-days use Bengali kinship terms and give an impression of having descriptive rather than classificatory terminology. The only classificatory term that they now use is the term *mama* for MB and FSH. This practice is also gradually becoming obsolete and now-a-days more young people use the term *pisa* for FSH. Junior levirate and sororate marriage although optional, is present among the tribe. These latter features are thought to be associated with classificatory kinship terminology (Fortes 1969 : 52).

It has already been pointed out that marriage between the true cross-cousins is prohibited. Behaviour prevalent between the MB and his sister's son prohibit such a relationship. Among the Hill Kharia mother's brother's relationship with sister's son is one of respects. The sister's son is thought to be a *guru*, (preceptor) he should not be given the part of the food which one has already eaten (*anto*). Obeisance is also done to him. The role that the sister's sons play in mortuary rite of MBF and MBM may be one of the reasons for such behaviour. During these mortuary rites the sister's son is required to accept one and half kilograms of rice and Rupees 1.25 from the mother's brother. This

* 1. Bhuia jat (?) 2. Bhuia tensa (kind of bird) 3. Ran bhuia (?) 4. Sal bhuia (sal/ leave or fruit) 5. Baddya bhuia (a kind of fish) 6. Bir bhuia (?) 7. Dhar bhuia (?) 8. Tiring bhuia (a kind of bird) 9. Pichla bhuia (?) 10. Bhuia mach (a kind of fish called bhuia) 11. Alkusha (a kind of fruit) 12. Dharam bandha kawri (dog) 13. Dondra (leaf cup) 14. Khela kamar (?) 15. Gorai mach (gorai fish) 16. Kurkut (a kind of big red ant) 17. Hamram (betelnut) 18. Pacha gulgu (?).

is thought to be an essential part of the mortuary ritual. The MB, on the other hand, has an important role in his sister's son's marriage. He ceremonially carries the sister's son on his hip at the time of marriage and receives one *dhoti* for his role. Indeed, in the two important life-crisis rituals, marriage and death, besides the ego's family and the patrilineage, the MB and sister's husband (*bahanai*) play a very significant role and seem to be the core of kinship network. The two life-crisis rituals, marriage and death, among the Hill Kharia played the important role of cementing the kins beyond the one's own kin.

It may be stated that now-a-days there is no prohibition on marrying classificatory cross-cousins although pronounced evidence in favour of its preference is lacking. The Hill Kharia have been subjected to various extraneous forces for nearly a century which might have left permanent imprint on their social structure. Whether some of the peculiar kinship behaviours still prevalent among the tribe are remnant of the past require much more detail discussion which we are postponing for the present.

Relationship between kin

Among the relatives direct interaction with husband's elder brother and wife's elder sister is avoided. It may be pointed out that levirate marriage with husband's elder brother and sororate marriage with wife's elder sister is prohibited. Children address the elder sister of mother as *jethi*, a term also applied to the father's elder brother's wife. Conversely, with relatives of FF's generation there is joking relationship. Free abuse and jokes with sexual overtones are exchanged between grandfathers and grandchildren.

Elder brothers and sisters are distinguished and addressed by the Bengali terms *dada* and *didi*. Behaviour towards elder brother in particular is respectful. The Hill Kharia have also adopted the regional custom of allowing the elder brother to have larger share of property, even if the amount has no other than symbolic significance. Young siblings often cooperate and help each other when they go out in search of food. But as they grow up and set up their own families cooperation becomes less. Sharing food or supporting one's own brother in case of quarrel with another person becomes less and less with the process of growing up. The socio-economic factor behind this kind of behaviour will be discussed later on.

The relationship and interaction with distantly situated kin is infrequent. Even the interaction with close affines may be broken for a variety of reasons. Apart from the factors of distance and the burden of procuring food, such other factors as participation in criminal activities by relations may be given as reason for not maintaining relations with

affines. Arjun Sabar pointed out that his father forbade them to visit his maternal uncle's village Magura because of their involvement in crimes. The families of father-in-law, MB, MS, FS are generally invited to participate in marriage and mortuary rituals. With them the affines of daughters and some are also invited. But now-a-days economic situation does not permit the luxury of extending invitation to so many guests. Six cases of marriages within the hamlet were observed. Of the four kin groups mentioned above only two families of various combinations were invited in four cases. In two cases one kin family was invited only. It may be stated here that it is customary to invite all the clan members living in the hamlet. But it was done in only one case. Apart from the obvious reasons of economic constraints the reason mentioned above, that is, of relations' participation in criminal activities and the constant anxiety of the possibilities of being accosted or chased by police while in relative's village, hamper regular contact with kin and affines located in distant villages. In discussing relations with the kin the elderly informants pointed out that in the past many people used to entertain guests with *mahul* drinks during marriage (*mohul biha*) but now the proximity of village society has made the people feel that without offering rice for food guests could not be properly entertained.

Summing up it may be pointed out that among the Hill Kharia beyond the lineage the larger kin groups remain a notion only. In marriage and other spheres it is the lineage which acts as the structural unit. But due to the socio-economic conditions relationships within this minimal unit are becoming restricted.

FAMILY

Family among the Hill Kharia is mainly formed through three kinds of method of acquiring mate, namely, (1) marriage by negotiation (*seje biha*), (2) forcible marriage or *sikar biha* and (3) *sanga* or second marriage. Of these the second kind of mate acquiring occurs less frequently.

Whatever be the form of marriage, the structure of family among the Hill Kharia is predominantly nuclear. The adult sons establish their own separate establishments in their natal village after marriage. Now-a-days there is also some evidence of uxorilocal residence. In Kulabahal two families have set up their household in their wives' village. The decision regarding choice of residence mainly depends on the husband's assessment of availability of food. Two stem families where old parents live with their married sons occur in Kulabahal. Sometimes it is found that old parents are rotated among the brothers living in a village. Generally speaking, the old parents, try to provide

for themselves as far as possible. When they become incapable of moving around they try to help their sons in fashioning broomsticks and fish-traps from bamboo. But it was found that sons, always hard pressed with critical food supply, neglect to look after their parents. In one instance, it was found that one old widow had to beg from door to door for a little *mar* (rice-water). She used to frequently complain that her grandchildren rob her of the things that she gathered by begging.

There are also two broken families having widows and their children. The sons of these widows work as *bagal* and the widows themselves maintain their existence by selling *sal* leaves to the shop owners as well as by other methods mentioned earlier (Chapter 2).

Ideally, the role of wives among the Hill Kharia is subordinate to that of the husbands. Men asserts this and women readily admit (Sinha 1978). Even in the case of levirate marriage where the wife may be senior to the husband in age, she continues to play subservient role. In fact, in comparison to the urban slum and rural poor (Sinha 1972) the relationship between Hill Kharia husband and wife seems to be most balanced and less prone to conflict. Even in the maladjusted cases recorded it was found that the system of separation was less given to conflict. The two parties concerned make it known to each other about their intention to part ways. The village people play no role, either in reconciliation or separation. Divorce occurs on the grounds of adultery, failure to cooperate in economic activities due to laziness, sexual maladjustment, barrenness, etc. But now-a-days the ground of denial of food to the wife often leads to separation. In Kulabahal two women separated from their husbands because of this reason. However, divorce seems to occur only among couples without child.

The harmonious relationship between husband and wife among the Hill Kharia is most evident in economic cooperation. One of the allegation levelled against the Hill Kharia *bagal* by the local peasants is that they refuse to be employed as *bagal* after their marriage. In view of the critical food supply this behaviour appears to be highly irrational. When confronted with this question the former *bagal* replies that now that he is married he cannot think of himself only. If he works as *bagal* he will be forced to spend most of the day in his employer's house leaving his wife companionless. Shorn of assistance from her husband, the wife will also be forced to take recourse to finding food for herself.

The division of labour between husband and wife is equitable. Although women play a subordinate role, men frequently perform some of the jobs usually assigned to women. The traditional role of gathering is shared equally. Both men and women take part in collecting roots

and tubers. But collection of *indur dhan* is done exclusively by men. Hunting is another domain where women have no role to play. But in agricultural operations women perform the major function. It has already been pointed out that the Hill Kharia are called upon to participate in two kinds of agricultural operations, namely, transplantation and harvesting. In both these operations women share the major task. In transplantation men do not take part at all. However, in harvesting while women reap the paddy men tie bundles of paddy into sheaves and carry them to threshing floor. It may be pointed out that while women are engaged in agricultural operations men perform the household chores like bringing water from wells and also looking after the minor children. This is particularly true of young husbands and wives. Older couples are relieved of this drudgery by their grown up children.

Child Rearing and Socialization

Following their formulation about child rearing (1957) in which six aspects of child training were delineated (obedience, responsibility, nurturance, achievement training, self-reliance, general independence) Barry, Bacon and Child (1959) examined the relationship between child rearing and subsistence economy. They found that child training practices and subsistence economy mutually affect each other during a continued process of cultural adjustment and evolution. They pointed out that generally societies which have food surplus put strong pressure on their children to be responsible, obedient and compliant whereas societies which have low accumulation of food orient their children to become self-reliant, independent and assertive. They write :

Child training tends to be a suitable adaptation to subsistence economy. Pressure toward obedience and responsibility should tend to make children into the obedient and responsible adults who can best ensure the continuing welfare of a society with a high accumulation economy whose food supply must be protected and developed gradually throughout the year. Pressure toward self-reliance and achievement should shape children into venturesome, independent adults who can take initiative in wresting food daily from nature, and thus ensure survival in societies with a low accumulation economy (*ibid* 1959).

Among the Hill Kharia it is found that self-reliance is greatly emphasized. But achievement which Barry *et al.* reported as highly valued in hunting and gathering societies these days do not find much of an emphasis. In the last chapter we found that knowledge about the ecology which was necessary at one time for survival is not placed highly in the achievement scale. The technological base too has eroded.

Even the highly prized character of manliness too is not emphasized. This is exemplified in the attenuation of the symbolic ceremony of groom selection (p. 43). The food situation is so erratic and uncertain that the character of venturesomeness which Barry *et al*, talked of remain at a very low ebb. Behaviourial assertiveness in their own community and in relation to the peasants is often unhelpful. Instead the character of withdrawal is found to be much more valuable as an adaptive behavioural trait.

Among the Hill Kharia both husband and wife take part in child rearing. But toilet training is provided by the mother. Once a child passes the toddler's stage and starts playing with the peer group or follows his older siblings he remains with them for most of the time. No segregation is made regarding the sex of young children. Girls are slowly inducted into household chores depending upon the presence or absence of her elder sisters. Burdened with their responsibility the girls are less free to explore the surroundings. They, however, accompany their mothers to the forest and thus learn the technique of food gathering. Boys, in contrast, are free to roam about and explore the surroundings and are even encouraged to find food for themselves. In this they receive instructions from their fathers. In their quest for birds, or birds' eggs, squirrel, etc., they receive a spontaneous training and gather valuable knowledge about the economic aspect of their life. But one aspect of life which is receiving less and less attention is imparting detailed knowledge about the forest. Informants pointed out that as most of the valuable plants have disappeared from the locality they find it difficult to transmit even the meagre knowledge that they now possess about the forest to their children. Now-a-days after attaining the age of 8-10 years another phase of socialization begins for boys. This phase of adapting to the agricultural activities last till they get married. Girls of about the same age also start earning for the family as agricultural labourers. They take part in transplanting and harvesting paddy.

Another aspect of children's socialization that needs particular emphasis is 'learning to live with hunger'. Children are allowed to suckle their mothers' breast as long as possible. But once they stop suckling their mothers lest they are ridiculed, they are taught to endure hunger. They are encouraged to gather food for themselves so that they learn the value of food and difficulty involved in gathering food. I found quite often children frustrated in finding food for themselves and remaining unfed by their parents sitting before their door steps and crying silently from the pain of hunger. Sometimes they fall asleep while crying for food. This early training to endure hunger and to

depend on themselves, at least partially, for acquiring food leads to the development of individuality among the Hill Kharia. From 8 years boys are sent to peasants' households, first as cow and goat herders and then as domestic-cum-agricultural servant (*Bagal*). Therefore, development of peer group relation and learning to experiment with group life ceases from this time. This is, perhaps, another reason why individuality develops among the Hill Kharia.

Association between parents and children occurs for a very restricted period. Because all able-bodied persons have to work for procuring food rarely can a free person be found in the hamlet who can look after children when their parents are away for work. Therefore, as soon as children reach a stage when they can play about themselves they are left alone in the company of older siblings. This situation places additional burden on older siblings who must look after their younger siblings. But as has been pointed out earlier, anxiety for food and hunger keeps them busy in procuring whatever little food they can for themselves. This leaves little respite or leisure time to them to devote special attention to their younger siblings. Consequently, the Hill Kharia children follow their older siblings and by imitating their siblings learn to forage for food since much of their play time is consumed by quest for food (see Chapter 3).

Adult males or females on the other hand do not show any interest for other people's children. On a hot summer afternoon in 1976 I was talking with Rathu Sabar. 5 boys aged between 3-6 of the hamlet came running to him. Among them was his youngest son, Baja, who asked him to mend his broken bow. Rathu immediately set about the task. It took him nearly 15 minutes to mend the bow. Other boys gathered round him watching the mending with interest. Among them Nabin. Rathu's elder brother's grandson asked him to make a new bow for him because his bow was broken beyond repair. Rathu brusquely shoved him off saying that he had no time.

From the above description it is apparent that the Hill Kharia place great emphasis on the future members' ability to look after themselves and endure hunger as far as possible. Experience to confront hunger and the realities of life around them from an early age perhaps makes the Hill Kharia aware of the value of individuality and withdrawing from group life as far as possible.

LIFE CRISIS RITUALS

Marriage : To a Hill Kharia to die before marriage and without a family means to die without attaining the full stature of manhood. Of all their rituals the marriage rituals are most elaborate. It has two clearly

delineable parts, the social-ceremonial aspect and the ritual aspect. The ceremonial aspect begins right from the process of mate selection. The mate selection procedure points out the value the Hill Kharia place on the role of women. Among them it is customary for the groom's relatives to make the first move. After preliminary contact has been established through a go-between (*raibaysha*) the groom's party would come to the bride's place. The negotiation is conducted in an indirect way. For instance the bridal party's spokesman would ask of the groom's party in the following manner. "So many decades have elapsed but we have not seen so many people coming together. What for have you come?" The groom's party answers, "One bird has been causing a great deal of destruction in our hamlet, killing fowl spoiling *bajra* and maize. We have news that the bird has come to your hamlet". The bride's party would then say, "Yes, there are some birds in the trees yonder. But what kind of bird are you looking for—*mayurchanda*, *bheladagi* or *banshtia*?" The three birds named represent three different age groups. *Mayurchanda* refers to a bride whose age falls between 18-22, *bheladagi* 14-18 and *banshtia* 10-14. The groom's party would answer according to the age of the bride they are looking for. The bride's party then would point out that the bird has been reared by them and that they cannot accede to their request of taking the bird away without any price. The groom's party would then ask them to state the price. The bride's party would give hundred maize seeds as their price. This transaction occurs through *raibaysha*. After hearing the price the two parties would then come closer and the groom's party would take out a few maize seeds and place 10 seeds as their price. After the seeds pass hands for three times and the amount of seeds increases to 50 it would stop and the groom's party would ask of the bride's party whether they are satisfied. They will answer in the negative. Then the negotiation is carried out in terms of rupees instead of in a symbolic manner and an agreed price is reached. Now-a-days the usual bride price is from Rupees 20 to 40. After this is done, the bride's party place a small quantity of rice, oil, etc., on a *sal* plate and request the groom's party stating that they have collected a few fruits which they may kindly cook and eat. The groom's party would say, "No, we are tired. We will eat whatever you prepare." The bride's party would say that they have not taken bath for days on end and therefore the food may not be to their liking. The groom's party would reply that no they would not mind. Whatever and in however way they would cook food they would eat.

After this it is customary for the groom to undergo a test of ability to demonstrate whether he is capable of looking after his wife by taking

the prospective bride with him in the jungle accompanied by a few relatives from each side. There a big tree with a honeycomb in it is selected. The prospective groom then climbs up the tree carrying along with him the bride and also the instruments for breaking the honeycomb. If he can successfully negotiate the tree and break the honeycomb then only his claim is accepted.

It may be pointed out here that this standard procedure has changed altogether in recent times. The ceremony of *panr basa* or bride selection has become less elaborate. The groom's party now-a-days does not consist more than two men primarily because of the desire to avoid the expenditure that they would entail for the bride's parents. The ceremony of proving the groom's competence has also been dispensed with.

On the appointed day the groom's party accompanied by the groom's maternal uncle, either real or classificatory, arrive at the bride's village and are given a place to stay well away from the bride's hut. In an open space, preferably near the *tulsi pinra*, a sacred shrine is established where various ritual elements symbolising the deity called *Marua* are placed. This deity is placed under a construction called *chamra* which looks like a kind of sun-shade having four upright poles on which rests a *mahul* and *sal* leaves covered roof. Underneath this roof a few articles, sundried rice, sacred grass (*durba*), paddy, a betel nut or a *haritaki*, a copper coin and vermilion, are tied together in a *sal* leaf and then placed in a hole and then covered with earth. Two branches, one of *mahul* and the other of *sidha* trees are planted by the side of this. Two earthen pots filled with water of natural ponds are then placed between these branches. Below the earthen pots a little paddy, a few blades of *durba* grass are placed. Inside the pot one branch of mango or *mahul* is placed. The earthen pots are filled by the bride's grandmother or, in her absence, some other relatives who are of the same generation. The grandmother accompanied by other women of the hamlet, goes to a natural pool singing marriage songs (*bihar geet*). At the pool the two pots are worshipped by applying vermilion, and sundried rice. Then one pot is carried by the grandmother another pot by any women of the hamlet not directly related to the bride. They bring the pots to the *Marua* and demand some paisa from the parents of the bride. They are offered some eatables usually *chira* (flattened paddy) and *gur* (molasses).

By the side of the *Marua* the brother-in-law (*bahanai*) of the bride digs up a long furrow, the length of the furrow being spread in east-west direction. On the right hand side of the furrow a banana tree is planted. On the left hand side an arrow is placed and three small wooden planks are then placed horizontally to the furrow.

In the evening of the day when the groom's party arrives, the bride is made to sit on a brass plate and is carried to the *Marua* by a few people of the groom's party. She is then made to sit by the side of the *Marua* facing the east. The groom, carried by his maternal uncle, circumbulates the *Marua* and the bride thrice, facing the west. After this the presiding deities of the *Marua*, the Dharam and *Kandni-randhni* (the presiding deity of the child) are worshipped. She is then taken to a natural pool by her maternal uncle for bathing. After this she comes back to the *Marua* where she embraces the banana plant thrice. She then sits on a mat and her brother-in-law (*bahanai*) encircles five or seven strands of thread around the little toe of her left leg and left ear. After taking it out betel nut and a bangle are tied to this thread. This is the sacred thread of the Hill Kharia. The bride's body is in the meantime anointed with mustard oil and turmeric paste. After this the bride's brother-in-law or grandfather slips the sacred thread on her neck and the bangle to her right forearm. Then the brother-in-law takes out some hair of her forehead and twists it into a lock. Through this fore-lock two drops of turmeric-mixed-oil is made to drip down to her leg. The third drop of oil then is applied on her head. After this is over, the brother-in-law carries her inside the hut. The groom's party then again carry her back to the *Marua* where she is given a leaf smeared with vermilion and oil. The groom snatches this off from her hand and keeps it by his side. He then removes the veil off his bride and applies the vermilion on her forehead. When this is over, both the groom and bride stand up and sprinkle water on each other from the pot kept under the *chamra* by means of a mango twig.

The groom's party then take the bride and the groom inside a hut from where the bridal party again take them back to the *chamra*. This is done thrice. Then the younger sisters of the bride wash the feet of their sisters and brothers-in-law. For this they are given a token payment. The people accompanying the groom's party are similarly treated by the bride's brother.

The bride and the groom are then entertained with *chira* and *gur* separately. The groom at first refuses to partake of the food till his father-in-law promises to give him some presents. In the past it was customary to make a symbolic presentation of a mountain. The presiding deity of mountain was supposed to provide the couple with food and protection from evils. But now-a-days a *dhuti* is given as present or a symbolic payment is made in lieu of it.

Next day a *sal* leaf smeared with vermilion is kept on the *tulsi-pinra*. All the hamlet's inhabitants who are invited to participate

touch this leaf. This signifies a pledge to work together in this ceremony. After this the people from bride's home request the groom's party to cook food for themselves which they decline saying that they will rather eat food cooked by them. Then all the items procured for the feast are placed before the groom's party for formal permission to prepare the food by the bridal party. The groom's party is then entertained with some *handia* (rice beer).

Next day the bride and groom leave for groom's village. Before departing two important ceremonies are held. In the one the bride is made to sit on a plank on the threshold of the door on her mother's lap flanked by on her left and right side by her father and husband respectively. There her father pours a little quantity (one *pua*) of rice on her *anchal* (one end of her *sari*). She is then asked by her mother, "where are you going my darling?" She answers, "*kamin khatte*" (to work as labourer). Then she throws back the rice which are collected by groom's party. The ceremony of getting the supernatural sanction for the match called *khatabara* has already been described before (p. 34). This is held just after the party come out of the hut on their way to groom's village.

After they arrive at the groom's hamlet they are made to stand under a similarly constructed *chamra* like that of the bride's village. There the groom's mother ceremonially hugs her and ushers her inside the hut. As this time the women of the hamlet sing marriage songs (*bihar geet*). Next day the groom takes the bride along with a bow and an arrow for a ceremonial bath. Other women of the hamlet accompany them to the pond. After having their bath the groom takes up the bow and shoots the arrow at dummy figures of animal in symbolic action of hunting. The bride walks up to the point where the arrow has fallen, washes the arrow-head by pouring water of a pot she carries and then again dips it into the pot and hands it over to her husband. She also places a little *gur* (molasses) in his mouth. This way they reach the *chamra*. Here the groom slips an iron bangle in her left forearm. After this ceremony the bride washes the feet of the people of her husband's parental generation. The relatives of the groom is then entertained with feast.

Next day the bride and groom come back to the bride's village where he puts an end to the marriage ceremony by breaking the *chamra* and throwing it in the pond. His brother-in-law offers a mock resistance and yields after he is placated on being paid a token amount of money. As soon as the groom comes back to bride's village he sits under the *chamra* and the maternal uncle of the bride touches his forehead with a betel nut and gives it to the groom. The groom

returns it to him. The maternal uncle then touches his forehead with mango leaves. After this the women accompanying the groom anoint the bride with turmeric and present the bride and her mother with a *sari* each and a *dhuti* to the bride's maternal uncle. They then place a plate and spread a *dhuti* over it. The bride then sits on it and is carried out of the hut. The couple then start for the groom's village.

It may be pointed out that changes in the ceremony like in the *panr basa* or procedure to test the capability of the groom, etc., are striking. This reduction in the elaborate cultural practices may be due to the impact of poverty. The procedure of bride selection has been curtailed because this elaborate procedure necessitated a great deal of expenditure. But perhaps the ceremony to test the groom's capability has been given up because people no longer place any emphasis on hunting. One noticeable but still not so statistically significant social aspect of marriage is the occurrence of divorce for denial of food. In Kulabahal itself two daughters, belonging to Sambhu and Sanatan respectively, deserted their husbands because their husbands took the larger share of food leaving them very little to satisfy their hunger. But according to the people themselves the most noticeable abbreviation that has taken place in marriage ceremony is in the ceremonial feast. As has been pointed out earlier even the circle of kin taking part in marriage has become restricted.

Birth : The Hill Kharia believe that successful birth of a child depends on the grace of the spirits, *Painsa-burhi* and *Painsa-burha*. Sometimes the malevolent spirit called *Panchua bhut* causes the death of a child either in the womb or after the birth. At least five kinds of *Panchua bhut* are distinguished : (1) *Damra Panchua*, who causes death when the child grows to two or three years old, (2) *Kachi Khaoa Panchua*, who kills the full grown child in the womb, (3) *Bahurupa Panchua* who causes difficulty in delivery of the child and the child is born with unnatural colour, (4) *Tarpa Panchua* who causes the child to fret too much, and (5) *Barma Panchua* who attacks the child all on a sudden. For appeasing these spirits prayer is offered at the crossing of two roads (*dopotha*) with sundried rice, vermilion, red cloth, red fowl, a small platform of *vela* wood (*Semocarpus anacardium*), a small winnowing fan, one earthen pot and a new piece of cloth.

When a woman stops menstruating (*dangua*), it is taken as symptom of conception. She is then placed under seven kinds of restrictions : (1) Should not eat from the end of her *sari* or *khari chenga* (*anchar pati khas nak*), (2) Should not eat rat, (3) Should not eat *dhamna* snake, (4) Should not go to a hut where death has occurred, (5) Should not cross any

stream or drain by leaping over it, (6) Should not eat fishes caught by trap, net, or rod and line and (7) Should not wear new clothes and buy new pots from the potter's hut.

The umbilical cord is cut by means of an arrowhead by any elderly woman of the hamlet. If the woman is a non-relative she will have to be paid ten kilogrammes of paddy. The placenta is disposed off by depositing it in a hole dug underneath the caves of the hut. The pollution period is observed for three, five, seven, or, nine days. The length of the period depends on the ability of the new mother. On the appointed day the newborn child's father gets up early in the morning when nobody in the hamlet gets up and goes to a natural pond and brings potful of water and keeps it on the *tulsi pinra*. His wife collects the ritual dust of the pollution floor along with sundried rice, vermilion, a little earthen pot and some branches of *vela* (*Semocarpus anacardium*) and throws these under a thicket. With this it is thought that the *Painsa-burhi* and *Painsa-burha* are conducted out of the hut. In the morning the *tulsi pinra* is smeared with mud water and then one or two kg. of paddy is poured on the *tulsi pinra* and the pot is placed on it. Then in the water of the pot three, five, or seven pairs of boiled and sundried grains of rice are deposited for sometime. These are taken out after a while and smeared with turmeric paste and left to dry. A little of this turmeric is also diluted in the water of the pot and three vermilion and black (*kajal*) dots are applied outside the pot. Then one dried grain of rice is carefully placed in the pot's water. If the grain subsides in the water then it is taken as a tale-tell mark of an omen that the child will not live. If the rice floats then it is regarded as a sign that the child will live and grow up. After this one fowl is sacrificed in the name of *Painsa-burhi* and *Painsa-burha*. The child is bathed in the water of the pot and its mother takes her bath in the pond. The lineage members as well as all the members of the hamlet take bath. The ceremony held to observe the pollution period's end is called an *naata*. In the past it was customary to host a feast but now-a-days this is not followed.

Death : Although the world of the dead is regarded as a separate domain the Hill Kharia maintain and regard it as obligatory on their part to keep contact with their dead ancestors. The mortuary rituals amply demonstrate this. After a person dies the dead body is carried to the burial place. There the dead body is placed in a grave with its head resting on the southern side. The Hill Kharia point out that the Kurmi Mahato place their dead body's head in northerly direction. Then a torch made up of branches of *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*) tree is lit and touched on the

mouth of the dead body. The eldest or youngest son usually does this job. In the absence of sons, daughters may also perform this job. After this the grave is filled up. Previously it was customary to deposit with the dead body food, new clothes and one or two implements. But now this custom is no longer adhered to.

While coming back to the hamlet the *laya* (priest) performs a ritual called *kantaduari* at a junction of two roads. Here *laya* places a big stone in the middle of the junction and covers it with a few thorny twigs. All the persons accompanying the dead leap over the thorn. On reaching the hamlet they take bath. The idea behind the ritual of *kantaduari* is to prevent the spirit of the dead from coming back to the hamlet. Ten days after the burial *ghatsradha* is performed. During this ceremony the *laya* applies vermilion and sundried rice on the shoulders of the four persons who carried the dead body to the burial ground. Two small fowls are then allowed to feed on the rice and after that these are killed by striking with branch of *Kend*. This procedure is called as *khand kataya namano* or procedure to dispel the spirit of the dead from the shoulders of the four persons who carried it. Then all the inhabitants of the hamlet take bath after smearing their body with turmeric and oil. The son of the dead person then comes back to the hamlet and offers his sister's son a few roots and tubers, Rupees 1.25 and one and a half kg. of rice. This offer is made at the *tulsi pinra*. The *laya* is also presented with a new *dhuti*.

After a year of the first burial the second part of the mortuary rite takes place. This is termed as *dothupa* or second burial. On the appointed day the *laya* brings one unused stone slab at the *nisangarah* or *muragarah* or (ossuary) and worships it by applying vermilion and sundried rice. Then he goes to the first burial ground and sacrifices one red fowl after making it to peck a few grains of sundried rice. Then it is struck by means of a *kend* (*Melanoxylon*) stick at its neck. If it does not die it is killed by twisting its neck. This is done to appease the spirit of the dead. Then the *laya* collects the little toe of the left leg and any bone of the skeletal remains of the dead body in a new earthen pot and covers it with a new piece of cloth. This is then carried to the *nisangarah* and placed in a hole and a new stone slab (dolmen) is horizontally placed over it. The sons of the dead persons then return to their hamlet where their wives wash the feet of their husbands and other elderly persons. On the same night sons go to the *nisangarah* with fresh cooked rice and place it in five *sal* leaf plates. By bringing their mouths close to the pot in which rice was cooked pray to their parent to come and take the food. This ceremony is called *naba daka*. In the case of unmarried person this ceremony is naturally not performed

and the grave stone slab (menhir), in contrast to the married persons, is also placed perpendicular to the earthen pot containing mortal remains of the dead.

It may be pointed out here that the second part of the mortuary ritual is now rarely observed by the Hill Kharia of Purulia. This has given rise to a new term *turukthupa* Kharia or the Kharia who do not practise the second mortuary ritual. Not only is the ritual of second burial skipped but also the customary feast usually hosted at the end of this ceremony is avoided.

Thus we find that even at the level of preliterate tribal communities the economic constraint hampers the optimal operation of some institutions of the society. In all the three life crisis rituals the most affected part of the institutions is social participation of the kin. In both the ceremonies connected with death and birth the customary feasts are avoided. In marriage we find that the elaborate procedure of marriage negotiation has undergone marked abbreviation and participation of the kin is less.

THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD

The Hill Kharia describe the earth as a square table resting on the shoulders of four big turtles. Below the earth there is an interminable stream of water. Above, the earth is covered by air in which different spirits, both benevolent and malevolent (*Nada*, *Churgin*, etc.) float about. In the air there are also various bodies like the sun (*bera*), the moon (*chando*) and the stars (*tarai*) which are responsible for the division of day and night. There are six stars which are particularly identified and greatly relied upon for gauging the length of the night at different seasons *bhurka tarai* (Venus), *chor kheda*, (pole-star) *juha khata* (orion), *sanjha tarai* (Mercury), *dhudi bhaira* (Canis major) and *sat bhaira* (Ursa major).

The supernatural world is conceived of as divided into various spheres, social and natural, each of which is controlled by a particular spirit. Thus, each family has its own ancestral spirits, *Burha* and *Burhi*, and the locality where a particular group lives has its own spirit too. This spirit varies in name and characters from locality to locality. When a man is away from the village for a long time or when a kin comes to the hamlet after a long interval a ritual called *satra* (when an anointed *sal* leaf is torn apart by two men holding it simultaneously from one end) is performed. If this is not performed the two guardian spirits of the place as well as the ancestral spirits might get annoyed and cause sickness or other harms to the host. The forest is ruled by a host of spirits but the supply of food is governed by the female spirit

called *Bankunari*. The honey production is looked after by another spirit called *Sikari*. The formation of cloud is assigned to another spirit called *Lagbir*, storms to *Uranbir*, etc. The well-being of a child is looked after by *Kandnirandhni*. The *Painsa-burhi* and *Painsa-burha* influence the safety of the human embryo's full gestation in the womb.

Although the supernatural world is thus segmented the chief of all spirits is thought to be *Dharam* which is conceived to be very powerful and permeates every corner of the earth. Apart from this, all the hills are thought to be symbols of particular spirits and the chief of all the hill spirits is thought to be *Barpahari*. Other deities and spirits particularly worshipped by the Hill Kharia are *Baghut*, *Vimli kanya* (the deity of lightning), *Rangahari* and *Bisaichandi*. Now-a-days some Hill Kharia also worship the Hindu goddess *Kali* particularly on the eve of dacoity or such other criminal activities.

FESTIVALS

Although the supernatural world of the Hill Kharia is full of spirits the paucity of the festivals when these spirits are invoked for various reasons is striking. In contrast the peasant's life is punctuated by as many as 11 festivals in a year. In Mayurbhanj Roy (1937) recorded various festivals in connection with shifting cultivation. The Hill Kharia of Purulia have two major festivals *Magh puja* and *Sarul*. On the first day of *Magh* the Hill Kharia worship all their deities and spirits. Because this festival coincides with peasants, festival *akhan jatra* or first ploughing ceremony this is also called *akhan jatra*. On this occasion each family calls its ancestral spirits who are thought to reside at the *chulah sal* (oven) to come and partake of the food offered to them. A few coins are also offered to them which must not be spent for personal end but should be kept aside and given away at the end of the year to any outsider not belonging to the tribe. Besides at the *tulsi pinra* all the spirits and deities are worshipped. Each family, according to its ability, offers fowl to the spirits. It was said that previously each spirit was offered one fowl. The *laya* also performs *puja* on behalf of the families residing at the hamlet.

Besides *Magh puja*, another *puja* observed by the Hill Kharia is *Sarul* or ceremonial offering of new fruits to the supernatural spirits. This is performed by individual families in the month of *Baisakh* (April-May) just after *gajan*. During *sarul* the deities are worshipped with boiled *mahul* (*Basia latifolia*), green mango, *kul* (*Zizyphus*), five kinds of flowers, such as *sal*, mango, *palas* (*Butea frondosa*), *jamun* (*Eugenia* sp.), *mahul*, etc., offering them on a plate made from new *sal* leaves at the *tulsi pinra*.

THE COMMUNITY LIFE

Much of the Hill Kharias' community life is led without any reference to the multi-ethnic village of which they are a part. They have their own village deity. They have their own *laya* (priest). This post is hereditary. No artisan caste or other functional caste groups like the Napit, Dom and the Kamar, serve them. Indeed the peasants do not regard the Hill Kharia as part of the normal village moral community. They were allowed to settle in the village because the peasants were hopeful of utilizing their labour at low cost to further their own economic gains. The rich peasant households who allowed them the privilege to settle on their fallow lands (*tanr jami*) were quick to realize that by keeping them under surveillance and strict control they could be utilised for gaining dominance in the faction-ridden village community. We will focus on this aspect when we describe the participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities.

The Hill Kharias' economic status relative to that of the peasants is marginal. They have been trying to increase their participation in the village economy. But from the description given in Chapter 3 it will be evident that the Hill Kharia have so far failed to get themselves totally incorporated into the village economy in a position of strength. They are, as it were, standing apart from the system. Although the Hill Kharia realize that the forest resources are more or less exhausted and hope that if they can get adequate cultivable land they can improve their economic condition, their experiences of participation in the village economy have made them aware that this is a difficult goal to attend. Economically, the Hill Kharia are still trying to adjust between two economic domains, that is, agriculture and forest. Emotionally, they find the forest more easier to adjust with because the supernatural power which reigns over the domain of availability of food can easily be comprehended with the help of their cultural idioms. They also feel traditionally more knowledgeable about the plants and animals of the forest compared to the peasants. On the other hand they find it difficult to adjust with and understand the mode of economic transactions that the peasants drive with its overtone of profit and exploitation. It was observed that when talking with the peasants the Hill Kharia refrain from all overt actions which can give the alter-ego some idea of what is going on in his mind. In Burdwan District and other parts of West Bengal the lower castes are organically related to the hierarchically divided village society and their pattern of behaviour with the members of the higher castes is more or less defined. But interactional patterns between the Hill Kharia and the peasants are yet to crystallize. The impression one gets about

their attitude and interaction with the peasants, perhaps cannot be termed as respectful, but it is one of indifference and has a great deal of similarity with withdrawing into a cell. Peasants complain that paucity of overt reaction on the part of the Hill Kharia makes it very difficult to interact with ease with them. In explaining the various aspects of an assigned work to the Hill Kharia they find that their effort is being rewarded by an inscrutable stare only or just a few answers in monosyllables. The reason for this kind of behaviour lies in the attitude of the Hill Kharia towards peasants, particularly, to the dominant ethnic groups, the Kurmi Mahato. The Hill Kharia have the notion of the peasants being deceitful. In the last chapter we have already described the norm of economic interaction with the peasants and listed on what counts the Hill Kharia find the peasants deceitful. Their experience as so-called "criminal" may also contribute to their mode of acting with the peasants. We will have occasions to discuss this aspect later on.

Socially also they remained a marginal group among all the regional communities. They are ranked lowest because of their unorthodox food habit. None of the communities take cooked food or drinking water from them. They regard the peasants as their "reference group" and have been trying to orient themselves culturally by following some broad features of the regional culture. Thus they have given up dancing with their women in festive occasions. In the village communal festivals like *bandhna* and *gajan* they participate enthusiastically. But their reputation as criminals and low social position as well as the peasants' heightened sense of ethnic identity remain a barrier in admitting them within the village society's fold.

The context of marginal situation is important here not because of the notion of status inconsistency inherent in it but so far as it creates a conflict situation where people participating in the interacting situation with the peasants define it as not wholly satisfactory. According to Dicke-clark (1966) for a marginal situation to develop following important conditions are necessary : (1) contact situation, (2) hierarchical interaction where the higher group acts as reference group of the lowly placed community, (3) social barrier which prevents the lowly placed group from participating fully in the life of the reference group ; and (4) status inconsistency, or, ambiguity in defining the interaction situation properly, giving scope to the dilemma in choosing proper mode of behaviour. In the region the Hill Kharia occupy the lowest position in the inter-ethnic hierarchy. But the Hill Kharia themselves strongly believe that they used to hold the highest rank till the Brahmin stole their sacred thread during marriage (Banerjee 1959). The

dilemma in choosing norm of interaction while acting, with the dominant peasants, that is, the Kurmi Mahato is evident in their mode of behaviour with them as well as their effort to emulate some of their cultural norms in their anxiety to conform to the dominant section's cultural pattern. But failure to get entry into the ethnic groups' fold has produced the concept of marginality, namely, the feeling of not being part of the larger socio-economic system, among the tribe which accentuates the notion of deprivation.

The community life of the Hill Kharia is characterized by lack of any institutional leadership. For hunting and gathering each of the families depends on the skill and the equipments that they possess. As such there are even no such persons among the Hill Kharia who are esteemed as the most knowledgeable who could be relied upon for such enterprise. From the inventory of animals that are hunted it will be evident (Chapter 3) that the Hill Kharia depend mainly on small games. Hunting is organized from the family level, that is, father and unmarried sons or between married brothers. Hunting hare by means of net which necessitates organising a group of at least ten people is now-a-days not considered as feasible. Therefore, hare when hunted is done mainly through snares. Fox (hunted not from open field but from the hole), snakes, lizards, rats, birds, etc., all are hunted individually or in small groups, members of which are consanguineously related. Therefore, the village as an unitary group in opposition to the outside world remains a far cry. Considering the small size of the hamlet this seems very striking. In work situation, two or three families, usually siblings collaborate. It was reported that previously with quarrel families used to sever their connections with the village and establish new households elsewhere. But now-a-days the principle of fission and fusion (Turnbull 1968) operates rarely because finding work in a new village is difficult and forest wealth everywhere has become scarce. The three main lineages living within the village are sharply divided into three groups. There is much ill-feeling and mutual recrimination between the lineages. The issues with which they recriminate against each other are denial of information regarding work situation available and practice of sorcery (*lasan*). When work situation demands participation of two or more men, members of one's own lineage are always preferred. If lineage members are not available no effort is made to draft non-lineage members. The Hill Kharia are greatly afraid of sorcery and any nagging ailments they suffer from is attributed to it. Usually non-lineage members are blamed for *lasan*. Because the lineages are constantly fighting against each other, grounds for such suspicion are always there.

Each Hill Kharia family tries to keep itself aloof from other's affair. They are seldom found to gossip together or otherwise spend their leisure time in a group. Even when a great deal of shouting or abusing occurs between two quarrelling individuals the other people do not show any interest in the matter and make no moves to arbitrate or separate the quarrelling individuals. When two groups are embroiled in dispute after an initial phase of recrimination the two contestants just withdraw from all interaction with each other. Indeed, avoidance of confrontation forms the keystone of their social life (Sinha 1978a). While playing football match with young boys, it was found, that even if any individual adopted unfair tactics none would protest. They would just ignore and go on playing the game. In the absence of formal social control mechanism this method of avoidance and withdrawal is adopted by the people to resolve dispute. For example, Arjun and Sambhu had a long standing dispute over a demarcation of a plot of garden land. Although Arjun had the majority of people's support, so far as the question who was in the right and who was in the wrong is concerned, it never took a serious turn because apart from giving verbal support in private people desisted from being divided into two overt warring factions. Another instance witnessed by me was when Sambhu went staff in hand and challenged his son-in-law and his father, Bhim to fight with him. The immediate cause of the dispute was alleged denial food to Sambhu's daughter Rani. Both Sambhu's son-in-law and Bhim sat nonchalantly and, therefore, diffused the tension.

POVERTY AND RECIPROCITY

One of the fundamental characteristics of primitive society is the pervasive relationship of reciprocity between its members. Gouldner (1960) pointed out that the need to reciprocate the benefits received earlier so that this process is continued serve as a "starting mechanism" of social relationship. According to Blan (1967) social exchange differs from economic exchange in entailing "unspecified obligation" and trust in other to discharge their obligation. Sahlins' (1968) threefold division of reciprocity, namely, generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity is an attempt to formulate the principles of economic exchange among the primitive communities.

It may be asked that given the mode of production of "primitive" societies, especially the hunting and gathering societies, can the theory of reciprocal transaction be applicable to it? In two articles Sahlins (1972) himself characterizes the "primitive" economy as "domestic mode of production". He points out that not only such an economy under-utilizes the natural resources but each of the domestic units also functions

without any relation to other such units and is prevented from developing anarchic tendency by kinship relationship which binds the discrete economic units of households into a close knit community. Therefore, even though the "primitive" economy has in it a tendency to work against the collective behaviour it is, as if, coerced into submission by kinship relationship and various redistributive mechanism that it entails. But in a situation of stress this economic unit falls apart and the value of sociability and altruistic behaviour is suspended. Thus, Laughlin (1974) by utilizing Sahlins' model demonstrates that in a situation of stress reciprocal relationship is put off. Laughlin notices that among the So agriculturist of east Africa as the situation of stress cases and production returns to normal phase the orbit of reciprocal relationship gets wider and encloses both kin and non-kin. During stress period, however, reciprocal relationship tends to become negative. Thus with the fluctuation of production intensity from minimal to maximal there is also corresponding fluctuation in reciprocity from negative to generalized.

Unlike the So, the Hill Kharia are passing through a situation of continuous economic strain. It was already pointed out before in what way social institutions have been affected by poverty among the Hill Kharia. Below we will examine the norms of reciprocity in the context of intra and inter-community interaction.

Generalised reciprocity : In the section on community life it has been pointed out the Hill Kharirs' marginal social situation vis-a-vis the larger village society and lack of co-operation and avoidance of overt conflict within themselves. Here we shall analyse the pattern of inter-relationships within the community in greater detail and show how the norms of generalized reciprocity govern their day to day existence. Sahlins defines generalized reciprocity as "transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned" (1965 : 147). Besides purely altruistic gift Sahlins lists such components of social relationship as sharing food, hospitality, free gift, help and generosity. Giving and receiving food form an important component of social relationship of hunting and gathering society. It was pointed out that hunting among the Hill Kharia is practically restricted to small games like hares, snakes, birds, etc. It is generally said that one hare can be shared among twenty people and this is actually done when hare is hunted in groups. But when individually hunted hare is bartered for foodgrain rather than shared among close kin. It was found that sometimes a man would bring snakes more than he or his family members were able to consume. The excess meat is preserved with salt

and taken next day. The feeling that motivates this behaviour is that as food supply is finite and there is no likelihood of getting the same next day, it is better to hold it back so that one is ensured of it, at least, for the next day.

The only exception recorded was regarding sharing of meat of carcass. It was pointed out before that Hill Kharia eat flesh of carcass. When a carcass of domestic cattle is discovered the information is passed on to co-villagers. But in case of carcass of animals that die in jungle like jackals, wolf, etc., the animal is first taken to one's hut and the best meat is gathered for family's use as much as possible and then other kin are given the opportunity to gather meat.

When food is in short supply and the people are intensely aware of the poverty of their kinsmen, it is but natural that generalized reciprocity will be inoperative. It was noticed that exchange of visit and hospitality among distantly related kin had also been affected. That married daughters should come to visit their parents is obvious. This type of visit between core familial relations occurs. But with the passage of time even these exchanges of visits have become rare. As Kala Sabar's sister who lives in Dandudih village, only six miles away from Kulabahal said, "I have come here after seven long years. Yesterday afternoon we had some food. Today even though evening is approaching there is no hope of getting food."

If perennial shortage of food supply affects exchange of food between kin, hospitality, mutual help, and generosity become even more restricted. In 1975 in the month of May six persons of the hamlet were arbitrarily arrested by the police due to the instigation of the villagers of the adjacent village Hullung for alleged participation in a dacoity. Of the six persons only one was unmarried. Three married persons left behind young wives with minor children. Of these two wives soon left for their natal villages thinking that as their husbands were absent, helps needed would not be forthcoming. One housewife, however, decided to stay back because her parents were old and brothers were encumbered by familial obligations. She had two young daughters, 5 and 2 years old. She found that although she was living among her in-laws she had to starve quite often because her in-laws turned a blind eye to her plight. Because work was not always available and she found gathering a difficult job with two small children, she had to beg from door to door for a little *mar* (rice water) from the peasants.

If any death occurs in the hamlet normally all able-bodied persons come forward to take part in digging grave and carrying the dead body. But Kala Sabar pointed out that these days people refuse to take part :

When my father died there were only two able-bodied persons present in the hamlet (Dhadkidih). We went to the other *dih*

(hamlet) and broke the news of my father's death and asked people there to help in disposing the dead body. Sambhu and Arjun asked for rupces twenty for buying liquor*. They bluntly told me that if they did not get the amount they would not go. I had no money then so I could not give. I came back to my *dih* and with the help of Mangal took the dead body to the nearby stream *Patloi* and left it there.

In other crisis situations also people seldom come forward to help. Sanatan Sabar's second son got himself badly burnt in 1971. At that time harvesting was going on and Sanatan Sabar was away from the village. Nobody was willing to leave their day's earning and help to carry the boy to the doctor staying in a village a few miles away. The boy ultimately died.

Gouldner (1960) singles out two minimal conditions for reciprocity : (1) People should help those who help them. (2) People should not injure those who have helped them. Among the Hill Kharia people recognise the futility of helping others because they do not have 'trust' in the other's ability to return the favour in the foreseeable future. Among the Hill Kharia the economic system itself is under severe attack. The institution of kinship operates at the level of lineage. It was pointed out that even the lineage beyond regulating marriage hardly operated as a binding social force. Under such circumstance family has become the only effective institution for survival. This has resulted in 'automisation' of family. Each family holding on dearly to the meagre resources available to themselves. The self interest of their own family makes them separate within this narrow limit. The norms of generosity, hospitality, etc., are not unknown but these are inoperative under the circumstance.

Relationship with the Peasants : The second kind of interaction encompasses the relationship between the peasants and the Hill Kharia. The Hill Kharia recognise that the peasants control a domain to which they are seeking entry and have no illusion that the interaction occurs from the same place. The Hill Kharia view their relationship with the peasants as contractual and it never endures beyond certain time period. Each work situation is judged entirely by the prospect of immediate return that it would bring. For example, in 1975 I persuaded the superintendent of the village school hostel to give four Hill Kharia women the job of

* During the second mortuary ritual (*Dothupa*) the mortal remains of the deceased are placed under a stone slab. On this occasion all the persons who accompanied the deceased to the grave as well as relatives, are invited to a feast. Now-a-days there is increasing tendency to postpone this *Dothupa* ritual indefinitely. Sambhu and Arjun apparently had this in mind when they asked for money.

plastering the walls of the school building with mud. The job used to be done by two Bauri women of Hullung village. I was also able to persuade the superintendent to pay them a wage higher than that was normally offered to the Bauri women. To the great satisfaction of the superintendent of the school, the Hill Kharia women did their job admirably well. It was compared with the performance of the Bauri women and found that the performance of the tribal women was better than that of the Bauri women although they took much longer time to finish the work. But unfortunately they refused to do the job next year saying that the wage offered was inadequate compared to the task. The Bauri women returned to the job and accomplished the task in accordance with the wage offered. In contrast to the Bauri women who assessed the job in terms of market principle the Hill Kharia evaluated the job in absolute terms and demanded that wage should be commensurate with it.

This situation may be counterposed against various patron-client situations that the Hill Kharia enter into. Here, too, the Hill Kharia try to fulfil their part of the duty honestly but nurture a notion that they ought to be paid an amount commensurate with the work that they think they have performed.

As has already been pointed out the Hill Kharia work as wage labourers and as *bagal* in peasants' house. Although peasants pay at the local rate for work rendered by the Hill Kharia, the latter think that they are being cheated by the peasants. Peasants, on the other hand, regard them as a source of cheap labour waiting for them to be exploited. The Hill Kharia frequently complain that peasants are deceitful and cheat them at the slightest opportunity. Thus they point out that paddy given at the end of contract are half mixed with chaff and measure less than the promised quantity. Frequently, instead of paddy some part of the wage is given in *kodo* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*) which is less costly and regarded as much inferior to paddy as a cereal. During lean months many *bagal* take advance a part of their wage. A 50% interest is charged by employees for this. It results in a condition where Hill Kharia *bagal* find that they are left with little of their wage at the end of their contract in which they have laboured hard but found the remuneration not proportionate to it.

From the above description it is evident that the contractual relationship between the peasants and the tribe operates in an atmosphere of distrust. The marginal situation of the tribe vis-a-vis the peasant and exclusion from the moral order of the village society facilitate this kind of transaction. According to Sahlins' terminology interactional pattern between the peasants and the Hill Kharia may be termed as balanced reciprocity (Sahlins 1968). But because of the hierarchical inter-ethnic

relations the Hill Kharia have a feeling that in most of the interactional situation they have to carry all the burden of disadvantages where the loss outweighs the gain. The Hill Kharia are trying to gain entry into the village society through their participation in two village festivals, the *gajan* and *bandhna*. Analysis of their participation show that they participate because at these times peasants freely distribute food which they naturally avidly seek. But so far as their social articulation is concerned it may be stated that they have been allowed to take up the marginal and arduous roles only which the other ethnic groups themselves are giving up.

In Purulia and adjoining regions of West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar states there is a unique institution of ceremonial friendship (*phul-saya*) through which kinship relation is extended to non-kinsmen both within and outside of a community. Through this relationship not only the circle of kin is enlarged but also network of economic co-operation and other opportunities are increased. *Phul* (ceremonial flower friends) participate in each other's social ceremonies and are treated as a member of the family. *Phul's* kinsmen are addressed by the same term as the *Phul* uses. Banerjee (1959) mentions occurrence of six cases of ceremonial friendships with Hill Kharia and Bhumij of Madhupur village. In Kulabahal too seven such relationships were recorded. The castes and community of the *phul* of Hill Kharias of Kulabahal were following : two Muslim itinerant traders of Bhabanipur village, two Muchi men of Dapang, one Santal of Chargali, and two Kurmi Mahato of Kulabahal. But when the motive behind entering into such relationship with a controversial community like the Hill Kharia was enquired into the nature and purpose of the ceremonial friendship became clear. The Muslim and Muchi men thought that by entering into *phul* relationship with the Hill Kharia they could carry out their business in snake skins in an atmosphere of trust. It may be pointed out that the benefits of such trust were enjoyed by these business men because the Hill Kharia depended on them for knowing the trend of market-price. These men also have excluded all other competitors and cornered the produce of snake skin of Kulabahal. The Kurmi Mahato and Santal men were landless labourers and *phul* relationships were entered into when they were *bagal* (cowherder). The Hill Kharia thought that by entering into *phul* relationship with these men they could take part in the festivals and get *mahul* drinks as bonanza. It is worthwhile to mention that in case of the Hill Kharia these ceremonial friendships do not extend beyond the economic level of interaction and become an all-encompassing kin relationship.

Poverty and Crime

In Chapter 4 we examined the impact of poverty on social institutions and interpersonal relationship among the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Poverty has greatly affected the reciprocal relationship, people being more concerned for their own family rather than group life. Atomisation of social life, marginal situation vis-a-vis the village society and a general distrust of the peasants and the human world around them govern there life. In this chapter we will examine the reason for the Hill Kharias' participation in criminal activities. The causes of occurrence of crime in human societies has drawn wide ranging explanations. Harold Holzman (1982) lists ten such theories including his own rationalistic opportunity theory. Holzman's rationalistic-opportunity theory is an attempt to combine the previous theories with his own formulation that once an individual finds himself poverty-stricken, stigmatized or labelled as criminal he rationally weighs his chances of committing a crime. If he can successfully hoodwink people and material gains are large he participates in the crime. In relation to the Hill Kharia the question we tried to examine was : given the low level of organized group life and marginal situation of the tribe relative to the peasants what draws the various sections of the tribe to criminal activities ? In eastern India participation of a hunting and gathering tribe in criminal activities is not unknown. In West Bengal itself the Lodha of Midnapur, a food-gathering tribe, is noted for their criminal activities. Bhowmick (1961) who studied them is of the opinion that the past predatory habit of the tribe born of their traditional food-gathering occupation coupled with their economic displacement from the forest are the reasons for their participation in criminal activities.

The immediate cause that suggests itself is that this was due to the large scale economic displacement. They are mainly food-gathering people and earned their livelihood by collection of wild roots, medicinal herbs, hunting and selling other forest produce. Gradual deforestation of the areas inhabited by them, brought in rapid economic rout, the shock of which, they could

not absorb. While some amongst them could just take to agriculture, somehow, and became settled, others could find no staying mode of livelihood and therefore, no apparent source of earning being available to them, took to the *more primitive ways of subsistence, of possessing by force, or burglary*. As the majority were thus deprived, in the interest of their own survival they organised gangs and established an ingenuous *modus operandi*, to escape detection. *The criminal propensity of the Lodhas, can therefore, be said to have been born of their habit of food-gathering, an urge for survival of every living creatures.* (Emphases added) (*ibid.* : 158).

But in Midnapur and Purulia the Lodha and the Hill Kharia are numerically minor and surrounded by powerful landowning peasantry. Even if the predatory habit of the tribe is admitted this habit cannot be employed with impunity on human societies. Unlike the forest domain human societies have their own value system and their method of aggressive reaction against threats to their properties, especially when these comes from a marginal group who is in so vulnerable situation so far as numerical strength and lack of control of coercive institutions is concerned. The same strategies applied to gather food from forest cannot be employed on the human societies. However, economic displacement and consequent poverty as one of the causes seems to have some validity because poverty generates a sense of deprivation which may goad people to take to the deviant means to achieve their desire. But poverty as the sole cause of crime has been consistently refuted by sociologists like Clinard (1974 : 115-118). Poverty as a reason of an individual's participation in crime may be justified. But when a whole community or a large section of it is involved in it as a group, as is the case among the Hill Kharia, it may be due to reasons other than just poverty.

From the previous description it is evident that despite poverty the Hill Kharia have been successful in keeping intact the family as an institution. The role-relationships within the family are by and large satisfying. Therefore, social disorganization as the driving force of criminal activities seems also untenable. We assume that for a proper understanding of "criminal tendencies" and activities of the Hill Kharia we shall have to examine the adaptive strategies that the people employ in a situation of deprivation. We also presume that these adaptive strategies will largely be determined by the peoples' perception of the situation and the social condition that prevails in the "arena". The arena in this case, it may be noted, is situated outside the Hill Kharias' own society. It may be pointed out that we are not discounting any occurrence of individual deviance among the Hill Kharia. Although

we could not find any instance of crime having been perpetrated within their own community ; deviance perhaps also occurs in Hill Kharia society. We are here, however, concerned only with the group as whole and not with individual deviance.

It was pointed out before in Chapter I that Coupland (1911) mentioned participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities at the beginning of the twentieth century. But what precisely was the reason, for their participation in criminal activities at that time when food resources did not become as acute as it is now, was not known. Historical record of that period does not throw any light. Coupland himself was silent about the cause of Hill Kharias' participation in crime. From the vantage point of having hindsight it is tempting to postulate whether it has got anything to do with the confrontation with the peasants or not. For, the peasants harbour a strong suspicion about the forest world, having no knowledge about that domain. They usually associate all the evils with the forest domain. The Hill Kharias' natural association with the forest might have made them believe that they are capable of robbing them of their property even if the association of the Hill Kharia with the crime could not be demonstrated. The Hill Kharias' alleged participation in criminal activities is all the more perplexing when we consider that another similar hunting and gathering group, the Pahira, were not considered as criminal. Although the Pahira, are not numerically as strong as the Hill Kharia they, nevertheless, occupy the same ecological habitat, having similar relationship with the peasants. Resolution of this question requires detail investigation. But it may be surmised that because of Pahira's numerical insignificance they perhaps were less in contact with the peasants than the Hill Kharias.

There is widespread "generalized belief" (Smelser 1962) among the peasants of Purulia that the Hill Kharia are associated with every theft or dacoity that occurs in the locality. In Kulabahal out of the total 25 males who are above the age of 20, as many as 19 males (76% of the total males) were arrested at one time or the other. Of these, five persons were convicted and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment (26.3%). Another six persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in a dacoity in Hullung village. The rest were arrested singly or in groups for various criminal cases. The district police authority of Purulia provided the following figures (Table 8) of total number of Hill Kharias arrested from the district during the period 1963-1973 in connection with different criminal activities.

Although the list given by the district police authority is by no means exhaustive, this shows the extent to which the Hill Kharia are involved in so-called criminal activities and their encounter with the police.

Table 8 : Hill Kharia arrested by Police and convicted during 1963-73

Kind of criminal activity	Persons arrested	Persons convicted	Percentage of conviction
1. Dacoity	67	10	14.9
2. Burglary	33	4	12.1
3. Robbery	6	2	33.3
4. House theft	38	5	13.1
5. Rioting	19	—	nil
6. Miscellaneous charges	40	5	12.5
TOTAL	203	26	12.8

Two reasons are generally advocated to account for the alleged participation of the Hill Kharia in criminal activities : (1) They are by nature criminal. This is the widely held belief among the police and other ethnic groups living in Purulia and the adjacent police stations of Bankura district and that (2) the Hill Kharia through these deeds build up hostile image about themselves so as to ensure their isolation from the peasants (S. C. Sinha personal communication).

Goffman pointed out, "we believe the person with stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively if often unthinkingly reduce his life chances" (1963 : 5). Among the peasants there are various kinds of stories current about the amazing quality of the Hill Kharia which enable them to perform crimes. Thus they are believed to be capable of moving to far off places to commit dacoity and come back the same night depending on nothing else than their two legs. Another story holds out the belief that they have elaborate network of underground tunnels which enable them to move from one place to another with impunity. But the most significant aspect of the social relevance of stigma is that it often coerces people into social performance which creates a vicious circle. Often the stigmatized person has no other recourse but to play the social game with cards stacked against him. The Hill Kharia of Purulia too frequently find that they have no other alternative but to act the way other people want him to act. The following discussion will reveal the general socio-economic condition which leads the Hill Kharia to participate in crimes.

The Hill Kharia of Kulabahal, it is alleged, habitually steal paddy from agricultural fields when the crop is still unharvested. They are also thought to be expert in organizing dacoity in peasants' houses and decamp with foodgrains, goats, and valuable movable properties. During the past ten years the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal are thought to

have organized and committed five dacoities in the locality. Of these three are said to be within Kulabahal village and one each in Hullung and Ladhurka village.

Interestingly enough, the Hill Kharia admitted that they did take part directly in one dacoity only, *i.e.*, in Ladhurka village, but denied that they committed dacoity in any other village. In two dacoities committed in Kulabahal, it was emphatically said, they were indirectly associated having played the role of contact between villagers and Hill Kharia of other villages. It was pointed out by the informants that, numerically and economically insignificant as they were, it would be impossible for them to commit or organize dacoity in the village if they were not directly helped and instigated by the villagers. Only a few years back they have been given the ownership right over the homestead land by the government. But previously they were at the mercy of the landlords (3 Mahato families) who could drive them off if they dared to go against their wish.

From the analysis of the three cases (two in Kulabahal and one in Hullung) of dacoities that occurred during the past ten years it will be apparent that factionalism and traditional rivalry between peasants are mainly responsible for drawing the Hill Kharia in the dacoities. The Hill Kharia are used by the peasants similar to the way they use their labour for cultivation. The decisions and the strategy for the dacoities are chalked out by the peasants themselves. The Hill Kharia's labour and their marginal position is utilized to accomplish the task. But in contradistinction to the agricultural enterprise the risk involved, *i.e.*, the confrontation with law lies squarely on the shoulder of the Hill Kharia. The district of Purulia because of its geography and soil condition is frequently affected by draught and consequent economic scarcity. Most of the people have no other source of income other than agricultural land. Barring a few big landlords, most of the middle peasants do a sort of tight rope walking for survival. In this situation anyone who wants to attain comparative affluence must skimp, save and practise usury. By judicious management of household economy and blessed by good fortune of not facing any sudden crisis one can build up a modest surplus. If one is backed by modest land holding, practises parsimony and usury, one can raise his economic status and place oneself among the influential people of the village. The obverse of this also happens frequently, that is, thriftlessness and injudicious management of household economy leading to gradual decline of fortune of a relatively well-placed family. This dynamic process gives rise to factionalism in the village. In recent years schools, government's relief operation and various welfare activities made people aware of the importance of power. Thus in Kulabahal there are three factional

groups. One group is led by the former Gram Pradhan of the village. He comes of a rich Kurmi Mahato family and through reckless spending has squandered off most of his land holding. He and his followers have cornered most of the jobs of the local high school. His leadership is now being challenged by another Kurmi Mahato (M. Mahato) who built a good fortune through share cropping and usury. In this effort, it was alleged, he was given support by the village's small but rich Tambuli caste. The third group is led by the former Pradhan's cousin. He has considerably improved upon his father's middle peasant status by combining usury with petty business (grocery). The former Pradhan considers him to be the greatest challenge to his position. He made several unsuccessful attempts to lure the Hill Kharia to commit dacoity in his house so that his economic backbone can be effectively crippled. Incidentally, in order to remove a person from challenging the established group, dacoity is considered as an excellent means. To accomplish this the leaders lie in wait for appropriate moment when certain action or cumulative effect of several such actions of the person who has been singled out for destruction happens to agitate the majority of people's mind (see Fig. 2).

Thus of the two households in Kulabahal in which dacoities were committed one belongs to Kurmi Mahato ethnic group and the other Tambuli. It may be pointed out that both the households were at loggerhead with the dominant faction that controlled the village affair. In the case of Tambuli caste they were represented in the village by only six families having settled in the village only a few decades before the Hill Kharia. Although they are numerically insignificant, they are economically regarded as prosperous. It is said that they came in the village practically as pauper but gradually through itinerant trade in lac, grocery as well as usury they accumulated enough surplus to buy land in the village. Until very recently the concrete house built by G. Tambuli was the solitary example of its kind. The Tambuli have also accumulated much resentment against themselves because of the relentless zeal with which they practise usury. S. Kar in whose house a dacoity was committed in 1968, was one of such men who through perseverance rose to be one of the prosperous men of the village. He was also accused to have committed several sexual improprieties. All these irritated the influential Kurmi Mahato who decided to wreck vengeance upon the man by ruining him economically. One of them contacted Arjun Sabar and paid him rupees twenty as earnest money. Arjun contacted Hill Kharia inhabitants of a village in Indpur police station. On the appointed day the dacoity was committed. A few months after the dacoity was committed S. Kar shifted his residence from the village.

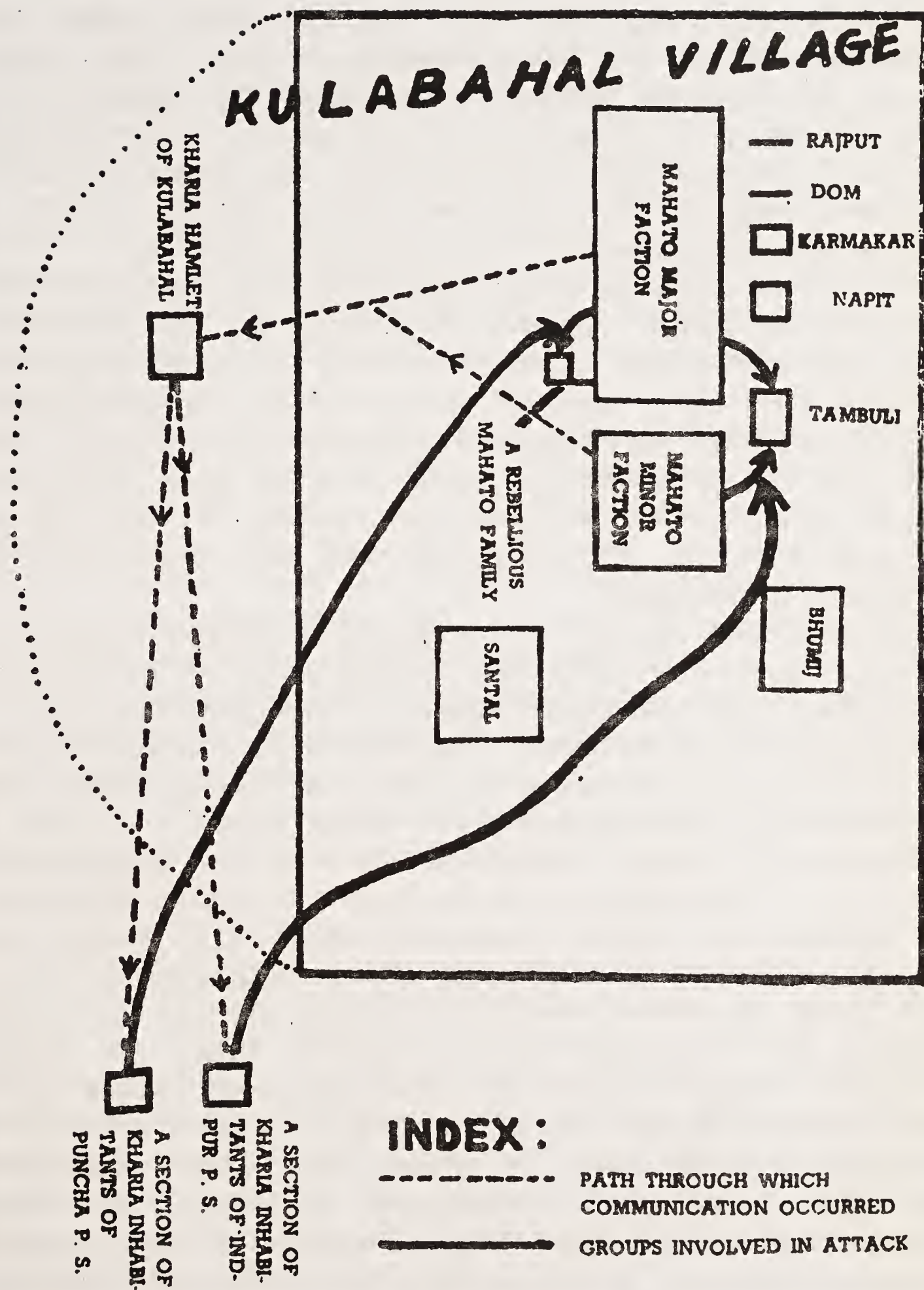


Fig. 2: Diagrammatic representation of the various factions and the process by which dacoities were committed in Kulabahal village and the communication channel in which the Hill Kharias of Kulabahal got entangled. (The solid boundary line represents the moral community of Kulabahal to which the village Hill Kharias are tenuously linked.)

Another dacoity was committed in Chakradhar Mahato's house in 1972. He was said to have refused to pay one maund of paddy as subscription that village *chau* dance organizers levied against him. Chakradhar Mahato who had a reputation of being stingy, refused to pay the 'exorbitant' amount of subscription. The organizers knew that Chakradhar had large stock of paddy and rice. Hence his refusal to give the paddy seemed to them unjustified. The organizers, therefore, contacted Judhisthir Sabar and asked him to organize a dacoity in Chakradhar's house. Judhisthir was paid rupees thirty and a bottle of liquor for this. He contacted the Hill Kharia inhabitants of Balakdih, his wife's natal village. Judhisthir was promised help by Chakradhar's own close relatives who agreed to keep the loot in their house if any difficulty arose. That there was collusion between the dacoits and the rest of the villagers was evident from Chakradhar's own statement. His wife said that she managed to escape from the house during the dacoity and ran down the village road shouting for help. But no one came to her help. The dacoits made good their escape with a few maunds of rice and paddy.

In 1975 one dacoity was committed in Hullung village in G. Mahato's house. He had a long standing rivalry with N. Mahato from whose father his father V. Mahato took Rupees 180 as loan by mortgaging a 39.3 decimal plot of agricultural field. N. Mahato's father permanently took possession of the land by removing its boundary and amalgamating it with his own field but refused to give it a stamp of permanency by paying V. Mahato the value of the land after deducting the loan and registering it with the land and revenue department. G. Mahato then wanted to return the money to N. Mahato who refused on the plea that G. Mahato's father has bequeathed the land on their family. G. Mahato then brought a surveyor and took out the 39.3 decimal plot in possession with N. Mahato's family. N. Mahato retaliated by forcibly removing the boundary stone demarcating G. Mahato's land. The latter then took the matter to the court and obtained a decree in favour of himself. N. Mahato, thus defeated, manipulated the village Panchayat to excommunicate G. Mahato. And finally brought the Hill Kharia from a village in Puncha police station to commit dacoity in his house. It was also alleged that he made other people give statement to the police that they saw the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal participating in the dacoity to shield the Hill Kharia of the village of Puncha Police Station.

On the evening of March 29, 1975 six persons (Binode, Rakhal, Kunja, Nakul, Judhisthir and Sukumar Sabar) were arrested for their presumed connection with dacoity in Hullung village from their hamlet when Sanatan's eldest son, Daman Sabar's marriage was taking place.

When police swept down on the hamlet, assisted by a few villagers of Hullung, most of the males fled the hamlet. But these persons could not do so because they were taking meals at Sanatan's hut. They were arrested under 395 and 514 I.P.C. regulations. Although the Hill Kharia were arrested after the dacoity in Hullung village five cases were framed against them (G.R. Case No. 546 of 74, 547 of 75, 443 of 75, 78 of 75 and 2290 of 74). Besides their alleged dacoity in Hullung village they were also charged to have committed dacoity in villages, Kaitordih near Hullung, Rangamatiya (20 miles away from Kulabahal in P. S. Hura), Panchara (25 miles away in P.S. Pancha), Dakakendu (30 miles away in P.S. Manbazar). Again of the six men two were framed with two charges and the rest with four dacoities. The nature of the dacoities were as follows :

1. On 10. 1. 75 committed dacoity in the household of Anandamohan Goswami of Dakakendu village in Manbazar police station and decamping with bicycle, utensils and paddy worth of rupees two thousand.
2. On 9. 2. 75 committed two dacoities in the households of Guiram Mahato and Khandu Paramanik of Panchara village and decamping with properties worth about rupees five thousand.
3. On 26. 2. 75 committed dacoity in the household of Kartick Majhi of Kaitordih village and decamping with paddy, goat and other properties worth rupees seven hundred.
4. On 23. 3. 75 committed dacoities in the household of Gati Nandi of Rangamatiya village and looting properties worth of rupees five hundred.
5. On 25. 3. 75 committed dacoity in the household of Gobardhan Mahato of Hullung and looting properties worth five hundred rupees.

The Hill Kharias of Kulabahal pointed out that on the day the dacoity in Hullung village was committed at least three persons charged with dacoity went to a village in Barabazar police station in connection with Daman's marriage. Moreover, at the time of arrest no house search was made or no warrant was issued. They were kept in Purulia jail till November 1975. On 10.11.75 they were exonerated of the two charges (Hullung and Kaitordih) by the district court but were detained under rule 3 of MISA. They were released only after the expiry of MISA on 1.6.77.

From the above it is evident how the Hill Kharia are implicated, sometimes falsely, in various criminal cases. Some informants pointed out that sometimes they are arrested for having committed dacoity in far flung places which let alone visiting they have not heard the names even. Arjun Sabar, who was arrested twice for alleged connection with dacoities, pointed out that when police torture them mercilessly in

jail in order to extort confession and names of the accomplice they give the names of inhabitants of villages situated far away or persons with whom they got acquainted in the jail. Acting on this information police arrest them putting themselves and their families in unspeakable trouble. Arjun pointed out that they were needlessly arrested in connection with dacoity in Hullung. Four men arrested in connection with dacoity in Hullung were away to Barabazar from the locality on the day because of Daman's marriage and Rakhal was in his *golas* (employer) house as *bagal*. But that there was something in the offing became clear to them when M. Mahato came to Mangal Sabar and gave a proposal of committing a dacoity in Kaitordih. M. Mahato also offered him ten maunds of paddy and one goat. Mangal refused because he was afflicted with leprosy. From the same village, the Chowkidar Purna Mahato contacted Binode with the proposal to commit dacoity in Gobardhan Mahato's household. But Binode too refused. To my question as to whether they have gained substantially from decoities Arjun said only a few maunds of paddy but it never surpassed their own collection from *indur dhan*. Dacoities are, however, mostly committed during the period starting from the end of winter to end of *niran* (dry season) when food scarcity becomes acute. Arjun pointed out that there are a few villages (Ramaigarh, Magura) where the Hill Kharias are known for their notoriety. But notorious persons are there among all communities. In jail they found Bramhin and Mahato criminals. But the police is always after them ; notorious or not. Whenever any crime is committed they are harassed. Police even searched their hamlets in connection with a bus hold-up near Ladburka village and beat up Bharat and Satrughna and took away six eggs. Because of police raids they do not stay in their hamlets during night and sleep in the thickets. When I asked Arjun whether they had told the police all these he dejectedly said, "who is going to listen to us ?"

The Hill Kharia also pointed out that stealing standing paddy crops from villagers' field in spite of constant round-the-clock watch kept by the villagers would not be possible without instigation and help from the villagers. Thus in 1974 Bhim Mahato engaged B. Sabar to steal standing paddy from his cousin's one bigha plot. The Hill Kharia were also engaged in the past by the peasants individually or collectively to steal paddy from the paddy fields of their enemies.

Now the question may be raised as to why the Hill Kharia at all participate in criminal activities ? Of the two reasons mentioned above the theory that the criminal trait is inherent in the tribe is untenable because no evidence in their behaviour, except certain amount of individuality, was found which could explain the endemic presence of criminality in their character. Large number of Hill Kharia who

were jailed may be taken as the tell-tale evidence of their criminal nature. But this may be explained as due to the arbitrary nature of the arrests made by the police. The police seem to be under the impression that arresting any Hill Kharia from a particular hamlet situated in the locality where theft or dacoity occurred would serve the purpose. For instance on March 27, 1975, as already has been described, only those who were caught unaware were arrested. No house search was made nor any warrant issued.

The theory that by these deeds the Hill Kharia project a hostile image so as to ensure isolation also seem untenable. We have already pointed out that, encysted as they are, the Hill Kharia have little scope to remain isolated. Besides, the Hill Kharia themselves are now-a-days trying to get integrated, however marginal it may be, with the peasants through economic activities and also through active participation in *bandhna parab* (cattle worship festival) and *gajan* festivals, etc. The god Siva which is worshipped during *gajan* festival is described as their own god. Every able-bodied adult male Kharia participates in it as *bhakta* (devotee). They are especially fond of performing the arduous physical penance of *kanta phunra* feat by piercing one's skin on the last day of *gajan* (see Bhowmick 1961 for *kanta fura* and Chattopadhyay 1961 for general description of *gajan* or *charak*).

Although the Hill Kharia have no cattle wealth, they are participating in *bandhna parab* (cattle worship ceremony) with great enthusiasm. The *bandhna parab* starts a day before the Hindu festival of *Kalipuja* and continues for two days after it. As the Hill Kharia lack any cattle they do not observe the rituals that are performed in connection with it (*gohal puja* or *garaiya puja*). But they are not increasingly taking part in *bandhna parab* as *jhangar* which is being given up by the peasants. The role of *jhangar* consists of moving from door to door of the village households on the night of the second day during *bandhna* for the purpose of keeping awake the cattle by singing *ahira jhumur*. They also take part in ritual mock play with the bullocks and buffaloes on the second and third day of the *bandhna parab* (*garu* and *kara khunta*) (for detail discussion of *bandhna parab* see Bankim Mahato 1978). These activities cannot be construed as congenial to projecting a hostile image of themselves among the peasants. Therefore, the reasons for the Hill Kharias' participation in criminal activities may lie elsewhere. The image that they still carry about their past life—abundant food, liesure and *furti* or *riz* (merriment)—make them pine for such a life. They have a notion that they are deprived of the good life the peasants enjoy. They think that their social life is monotonous and lacks any *furti*. In contrast, the peasants' life is punctuated by various *parabs* or festivals through which peasants enjoy their life.

Part of the reasons of their participation in *bandhna parab* is that the Mahato who are otherwise very frugal in habit, provide ample scope to the Hill Kharia to enjoy themselves.

The reason why the Hill Kharia are ready to interact with the peasants, of whom they have a notion of being deceitful, is that unlike other contractual relation the peasants on these occasions readily fulfil their part of obligation. As it might be expected this kind of interaction does not take place all on a sudden but is protracted. The peasants who drive them hard in normal work situation and do not mix freely with the tribe behave, as it were, they are interacting from the same plane. They also conjure up in the minds of the Hill Kharia an image of abundant reservoir of food that would be available to them if they are successful in the act of dacoity. The Hill Kharias' inability to defer gratification and his conception of what a man should possess to lead a happy life, in other words, poverty and its consequence drive the Hill Kharia to participate in dacoities and other criminal activities. Through their long knowledge of peasant's way of life they know that they lack many things that peasants have. Also the past way of life of their forefathers which was characterized by abundant food and leisure is no longer possible. The lure that the peasants' promise hold to them is precisely which their forefathers were fortunate to have at least some days, relief from the anxiety of food supply and happy abandonment. Peasants not only promise these but also assure them safe conduct from the village after the dacoity has been committed.

Therefore, it is apparent that the Hill Kharia's stigmatized status as criminals and their awfully low level of economic base put them in such a situation that they have no other alternatives but to interact with the peasants from that plane. Their status as landless poor agricultural labourers is accepted and primarily they were given land to build their huts in the village for that purpose. But much as the Hill Kharia would like to underplay their stigmatized status of being criminals, in a situation where peasants or a faction of them is sorely pressed to utilize this role, they find that to realize some of their life's cherished desires (a few days uninterrupted food supply) they have no other alternatives but to accept this stigmatized role and act accordingly. It is also true that in such a *transaction* (in the sense defined by F. Barth 1971) the Hill Kharia are aware of the danger associated with it and in comparison the rewards are less. But it must be considered that in a poverty-stricken condition whatever they hoped to rope in by obliging the peasants in their factional fights must be considered as windfall. They also know it that they cannot refuse to participate or otherwise wriggle out of such interaction because they have to contend with combined might of a village faction and beyond it the ominous

power of the police. Therefore, strategically the best course open to them is to indirectly participate in criminal activities in so far as the villages where they live are concerned and participate in dacoities directly in villages beyond their immediate surroundings. This lessens the chance of the danger of getting implicated directly. Marginally situated as they are from village society ; after a dacoity has occurred in the village they behave as if they have no knowledge of the occurrence. If police make search of their huts they cannot be implicated on the basis of it because the looted articles will be on its way to some distant village. In petty crimes like stealing standing paddy crops from field they participate directly. But in such cases the danger of being caught is less and the amount of the stolen articles never reaches a proportion which cannot be effectively hidden or immediately consumed.

Ironically, their stigmatized image and participation in criminal activities may not have ensured isolation but are bearing fruits in another way. In Kulabahal, the peasants, from their apprehension of lurking danger of dacoities through them and witness the perseverence of a generation to better its economic condition fritted away ; are employing the Hill Kharia as night guards. All the 24 families of Hill Kharia of the village have also been employed to guard peasants' standing crops in novel attempt to insure the safety of the crops.

Internalization of Deprivation

In the previous three Chapters (3, 4 and 5) we have described the deprived economic life and its repercussion on the interactional pattern in the Hill Kharia society. It has been demonstrated how the Hill Kharia are trying to eke out an existence by combining agricultural labour and other locally available means open for earning an wage with their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering. People concede that they are living in deprived economic condition and trace this as due to having fallen down from the supernatural grace.

In social life there is evidence of indefinite postponement of the second part of mortuary ritual (*dothupa*). Reciprocity is marred by economic strain. Their participation in criminal activities was traced as partly due to their deprived condition.

However, the effect of deprivation among the Hill Kharia is not confined only to these spheres. There is a distinct trend towards internalization of deprivation by rationalizing the process of deprivation through myths. That this stage of deprivation is not a passing phase is also evident from people's attitude to the surrounding environment. In this chapter we will discuss the process of internalization of deprivation.

Unlike the peasants and the Santal tribe the Hill Kharia have no *jan-kahani*, *sun-kahani* or *binti* (Santals') which act as a storehouse of knowledge of these communities regarding the world around them. However, a few myths that the Hill Kharia have, show an overriding concern for the deprived state in which they are living. Even the myths about the origin of the ethnic group demonstrate their confrontation with deprivation. Roy's monograph (1937) contains a description of a myth which purports to describe the way by which the Hill Kharia originated from the egg of pea fowl. But the Hill Kharia of Purulia have no knowledge of such myth. Instead they trace their origin from the mythical figures such as Jara Savar, the killer of Krishna, Ekalabya or simply from the couple, the Savar and the Savari of the Ramayana. According to the last story which is the most current among tribe the Savar and the Savari were very virtuous people and used to live by gathering fruits and tubers and hunting animals. It so happened that

when one day Ram lost his way in the jungle in search of Sita and became weak with hunger and thirst he came across the Savar and told him of his plight. The Savar gave him food and water and told him of the direction in which Sita had gone. The supreme deity himself was very pleased with his behaviour and wished that they should worship him. The Savar was hesitant and told the deity that he was very dirty and seldom took bath. The deity refused to hear such plea. Therefore, the Savar made a little *kumba* deep inside the jungle for the deity and started worshipping him. One day a Brahmin boy came into the jungle and saw the daughter of the Savar and wanted to marry her. As the daughter was willing the Savar and the Savari gave their consent. The Brahmin boy married the daughter and started living in the jungle. Seeing the virtuous, simple, and happy life that the Savar and the Savari led the Brahmin boy was curious and wanted to know the key to their happiness. One day in course of searching for food he suddenly came across the *kumba* where the Savar kept his supreme deity. Seeing the special way in which the Savar kept the place, the boy thought that this might be the reason behind the Savar's happiness. One day when no one was around he stole the supreme deity and fled from the jungle. Thus the Savar and the Savari lost their deity.

But not content with stealing the deity, one day the Brahmin stole even the sacred thread that the Savar was wearing. It so happened that one day before climbing up a tree for collecting fruits the Savar left the sacred thread at the foot of the tree lest it was torn. The Brahmin who was looking for such an opportunity and was hiding nearby made it into a rat snake (*dhaman*). When the Savar got down from the tree he could not find the thread. Instead he saw only a rat snake moving away at his approach. He, therefore, left it alone thinking that he perhaps was mistaken and left the place. The Brahmin boy then came out and stole the thread. On his return to the hut the Savar once again began searching for the thread. But after sometime he realized what had happened and went out to catch hold of the rat snake. That is why even to this day the Hill Kharia run after the snake.

The above story describes how the Hill Kharia were leading a happy life in the jungle until they came into contact with the outside world. The Brahmin as the representative of the outside world robbed the Hill Kharia first of their daughter then the supreme deity and lastly the symbol of their nearness to the supernatural being, the sacred thread. Thus deprived of their cherished possessions, the Hill Kharia were reduced to relentless chase to get back the blissful state of existence. But this is a kind of deprivation which today we will term as "social deprivation". Two other myths explain the reason of the material deprivation of the Hill Kharia. One myth narrated by the

Hill Kharia of Binpur area of Midnapur district describes the process of material deprivation thus :

When the supreme deity created the world he allotted each ethnic group certain portion of the land and resources. But he did not give the Kharia anything although he was near at hand. This made the Kharia very unhappy and he went away into the jungle. There he built an image of the supreme deity and started worshipping him under a *sal* tree. Thus appeased the supreme deity asked the Kharia to name what he wanted. At first the Kharia got puzzled. And began to look all around for the source of the voice. Then he found that indeed it was the image of the god through which the supreme deity was speaking. The Kharia then asked for some time so that he could consult his kinsmen. But his kinsmen could not decide on anything. The Kharia then came back to the deity and reported the result of his consultation with kinsmen. The supreme deity then gave the Kharia a bow and an arrow and a *khanti* (digging stick) and bid him to search for his food in the jungle with the help of these tools.

Another myth narrated by the Hill Kharia of Purulia blame the Santal for dislodging them from the supernatural grace. From the myth (described in Chapter 2) it is apparent that the Santal might have interfered in their smooth process of economic progression. It may not be unlikely that the Santal who have widely dispersed from their original homeland in search of virgin land to different parts of eastern India came into confrontation with the Hill Kharia who were then already practising shifting cultivation. It is noteworthy that in some of the regions inhabited by the Hill Kharia the Santal are found in large numbers (in Mayurbhanj, Dhalbhum and Midnapur). In Purulia it is also possible that the Santal were the first people that the Hill Kharia encountered.

The internalization of deprivation among Hill Kharia also finds expression in marriage songs. The marriage of the Hill Kharia has become the only platform for conviviality, when they dance *danr natch* and sing *jhumur* songs. In Purulia and adjoining regions the Hill Kharia have given up *danr natch* because the free mixing of males and females is considered derogatory. But *jhumur* songs are still sung. During various phases of marriage ceremony women sing numerous *jhumur* songs which are not only expressive of social relations but also eloquently portray the state of deprivation they are living in. For example, consider the song sung during the time of departure of the groom to bride's village for marriage :

Sasural je jacho babu

Kotha pabe jama

Kotha pabe juta

Tor bauko to janamer kangal.

(You are going to father-in-law's house. But where from shall you get shirt? And where from shall you get shoes? Your father is a born destitute.)

Or when ushering in the new daughter-in-law after the bride and the groom have reached the groom's village from that of the bride.

Khaite anna nai ma

Makhite telo nai

Suite go ma

Tenpero bichana

Tenpero bichana

Du-din dinachari

Baburo bichanay

Janamo katibe go ma

(We have no food to eat

No oil to anoint our body

For bed my daughter we have only the end of the *sari*

Thus my daughter you will have to lead

Your life with my son.)

Or, on the occasion of going for bath during the ceremony of bringing new water to the hut by the bride and the groom.

Vanre to tel nai

Tel o to furalo go

Mayer antar khalo khalo kare go

Nano babu kando dio

Mayer antar khalo khalo kare go.

(The oil pot has no oil

We have no oil either

Mother's heart is full of sorrow

Do not cry my son

Mother's heart is full of sorrow.)

The three songs given as example above are songs sung by the womenfolk during various phases of marriage ritual. But songs used to be sung also during *danr natch* after marriage ceremony both in the bride's and the groom's villages. These *jhumur* songs used to be mainly sung by the males accompanied by *dhamisa* (kettle drum) and *madal* (drum). To the rhythm of the *jhumur* songs women used to dance *danr natch* forming a single file. Analysis of the songs sung both during *danr natch* and marriage ritual shows that these touch on various aspects of the tribe's life including the economic conditions. Taken together the proportions of songs depicting poverty may not be high. Nevertheless, the very presence of the songs depicting material deprivation

during such a happy occasion as marriage, shows how far the scarcity condition has affected the consciousness of the Hill Kharia.

THE FEELING OF POWERLESSNESS AND ANXIETY

Not only do the Hill Kharia have a feeling that the food resources once available in the jungle in plenty have now become scarce, they also feel that the affective relationship they once had with jungle has been snapped. Informants told me that in the past on their proper worship of the spirits of the jungle the peace of the villagers depended. Particularly the animal spirits of the tigers (*Baghut*) and elephants (*Hathithakur*) used to be worshipped. Thus propitiated these animals did not destroy the property of the peasants or kill the inhabitants of the villages. But now-a-days though the Hill Kharia still worship these spirits during *akhan jatra* instances are not rare when tigers or elephants have killed a Hill Kharia.

The tribe feel equally at a loss when confronted with the social world beyond their own. We have already described the attitude of the Hill Kharia towards the peasants. Beyond the peasants the power of the police, whose sudden and arbitrary arrests make them helpless, appears to be even more beyond control. The police are symbolised as "tiger". As has been mentioned above the Hill Kharia tried to gain control over this spirit by supernatural means. Just as this control has become disfunctional the control over the modern "tiger" has also remained beyond their reach. To obviate the possibility of being caught unaware by the "tiger", i.e., the police, people stay away from their huts during night and sleep in the bushes nearby so that they, are not literally caught unaware by this "animal". Even during day time if they see any unknown stranger approaching their hamlet they would flee to the field. It has already been described (Chapter 1) their flight during my first meeting with them. Thus it seems that finding that the nature and society that surround them are inimical the Hill Kharia have decided that being away from the direct confrontation with the outside world, is the best method open to them. It is argued here that behind such behaviour of withdrawal there is a notion of powerlessness or helplessness. Because they feel that the world in which they live in cannot be controlled either through supernatural or socio-political means, they suffer from a sense of powerlessness and anxiety. Mandler (1972) theorizes that when an adequate behaviour pattern or a substitute behaviour to the behaviour one is accustomed to previously is not available, it leads to a state of powerlessness or helplessness and anxiety.

One of the conditions that leads frequently to states of helplessness is interruption of plans or behaviour. Thus, when an organized

sequence of behaviour or an organized plan is interrupted, that is, the organism may not complete the plan either behaviourally or cognitively, he is in a state of arousal. When interruption leads to arousal and no appropriate behaviour is available either to substitute for the original plan or to find alternate ways to the original goal, etc., then we have what I think is one typical state of anxiety.....Furthermore, it will lead to helplessness if and only if no adequate continuation behaviour or substitute behaviour is available. (*ibid* : 370)

According to McReynolds (1956) inability to integrate the data of the world into meaningful schemata, whether in terms of selfconcept, or a predictive model of the environment is a basic source of anxiety.

The Hill Kharias, we found, were accustomed to hunting and gathering economy and later on also began practising shifting cultivation. But their mode of economy was interrupted and they had to fall back on hunting and gathering exclusively. Later, with the depletion of forest, they began to search for new mode of existence and had to remain content with the role of agricultural labourers. Even agricultural labour provided them with only partial employment. Their participation in criminal activities, under circumstances described before, and subsequent prosecution as criminals make them believe that they cannot hope to get support and help either from the surrounding peasantry or from the institutions of the State. All these generated a condition conducive to the growth of a feeling of hopelessness in the Hill Kharia mind. It was pointed out that their failure to cope with sudden police raids on their hamlets made them adopt the only avenue open to them, that is, fleeing and keeping themselves aloof from direct social contact with other people as far as possible. Their helplessness was evident when I asked some informants why they did not disclose the name of their provocators to the police. They instantly pointed out, "what is the use? We are tortured by police, why invite the same from the peasants also?"

Prof. T.C. Das studied the Hill Kharia for a short period in 1931 and described them in the following words :

Extremely morose in disposition, the wild Kharias look on life as a burden which they are forced to carry on throughout the long tenure of existence. Life does not seem to have anything good to offer to them nor do they struggle to extract a few moments of happiness from it. Tacit submission to the freaks of fate forms the keynote of their character (1931 :7).

Although Prof. Das observed them 47 years ago, the present day impression about the Hill Kharias' adjustment to economic strain remains substantially true. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that

the privation of the Hill Kharia is now more intense and they suffer from a feeling of despondency on occasion. But even within this limiting condition the Hill Kharia find certain features which make their life less burdensome. During the first few months of field work I found that due to the drought condition that prevailed in the district, landless peasants along with the Hill Kharia were starving. Information reached us that one landless peasant of adjacent village committed suicide because he could not bear the sufferings of starvation. After a few days another landless peasant, Patal Dom of Kulabahal also died of hunger. At that time the situation in Khariadih was very grim. The people had no certainty of getting food. A few families were reduced to begging. From the ethnographer's point of view the situation looked desperate. But when the subject of suicide due to hunger was broached, one informant startled me by saying, "Sabars are made of tougher element. They do not die of hunger. In the month of Magh we will have *indur dhan*. We can even invite you to a meal at that time." This condition may be compared with the situation that prevails in the slums of Calcutta. Here the people not only suffer from poverty but also do not harbour any hope that the monotony of their life may be broken by some favourable condition in future. They have resigned themselves to the situation that they have been forced to live in (Sinha 1972). The Hill Kharia, on the other hand, are aware of the total situation, but their past hunting and gathering mode of economy have provided them with unique experience of coping with the uncertainties of life and help them to confront the situation they find themselves presently in. It is true that they do not think that their past point of economic anchorage and the present economic system with which they are trying to adjust are of the same nature. Their concept of "good life" too has changed and has as its reference the peasants' way of life. But their past life has provided them an inner strength enabling them to cope with the scarcity better than other people. But the Hill Kharia are aware that this last exclusive source of food which give them a short respite from the anxiety of getting food is no longer their exclusive domain. Other ethnic groups sorely pressed by want of food are also trying to collect as much *indur dhan* as possible. The Hill Kharias' only consolation is their technical superiority over other ethnic groups where the *Khanti* or digging stick gives them added advantage and their much longer experience in gathering *indur dhan* stands them in good stead. The Hill Kharia lament that other ethnic groups have shortened their easy period of comparative plenty by quite a few days.

Therefore, it is being argued here that the Hill Kharia have adjusted to the cyclical phases of lean and less lean periods. They know that the

scarcity with which they struggle is intense and cannot easily be overcome. The forest wealth has touched its nether. But they are aware that the wasted forest will produce land which can be used for agricultural purpose. Indeed some of the ethnic groups living in the adjacent villages, *e.g.*, Dapang and Chargali, people notably the Santal and the Kurmi Mahato have successfully managed to convert the forest land to agricultural field and retain possession of it. The history of the Hill Kharia of Kulabahal shows that they too tried to convert some of the forest land or high infertile land (*tanr jami*) to agricultural field. But each time they had to part with the land. The forest regulations stipulate that the waste forest lands are government's property. But sometimes they also found that the Kurmi Mahato managed to get the converted land as their own through forcible possession or simply claiming, that the converted land is recorded against their name. The tribe's numerical insignificance and marginal situation do not give them any leverage in realizing their dreams. The Hill Kharia still think that their salvage lies in acquiring agricultural land. They hope that changes in the circumstances will give them the land the receding forest will yield.

Summary and Conclusion

From the foregoing descriptions (Chapters 2-6) it will be evident that in this purposive ethnography our major concern has been to demonstrate the impact of poverty on the society and culture of the Hill Kharia of Purulia. Anthropologists engaged in discovering the nature of societal structure of the hunting and gathering tribes point out that due to the adaptation to the specialized mode of economy these societies have a loose-knit segmentary social organization. In a homogenous unstratified society like that of the Hill Kharia there was not much scope for adopting the method of controlled intra-group comparison to probe into the nature of variation due to the impact of poverty. We, therefore, confined ourselves to showing how different institutions of the Hill Kharia society functioned within the economic constraint of a disintegrating hunting and gathering economy where the ecological base for the primary means of production had been severely eroded. We also tried to find out the reasons for the Hill Kharia's widespread participation in criminal activities and how for this was related to poverty.

In Chapter 2 it has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia now live in isolated hamlets close to the peasant villages. Their choice of peasant villages was not guided by availability of work or any such rational considerations but by proximity of the village to forest. In case of Kulabahal it was the last camp where the forefathers of the present day Hill Kharia inhabitants stopped on its look out for food in the forest. Although the Hill Kharia participate in the village economy, their articulation with the social, religious and political organizations of the village is at the best tenuous.

In Chapter 3 the economic life of the Hill Kharia has been described. It has been pointed out that with the gradual depletion of forest the Hill Kharia are participating more and more in agriculture as labourers. With this they still persist in their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering although the dwindling forest hardly meets their minimum requirements. This cannot be construed as a force of habit. It is more due to their inability to get the basic requirements from the village agricultural system. Various jungle products, namely, medicinal plants, *sal*, *kend* leaves and fire-woods are sold to the villagers. They also sell

objects fashioned from bamboo. But combination of these activities fail to provide them with their minimum requirements of food. This is evident from the unusually long periods of seven lean months from *Magh* to *Jaistha* (Feb.-June) and from *Bhadra* to *Aswin* (Sept.-Oct.) when the supply of food remains critical causing periodic starvation for days on end. Their serious economic plight is evident from their extent of indebtedness and the way they split their wage for sowing season into two halves. One half of the wage is consumed in advance during April-May and the other half is preserved for the actual sowing season.

Some Anthropologists (Lee 1968, Sahlins 1972) have pointed out that abundant leisure is the singular characteristic of the hunting and gathering societies. It has been shown that among the Hill Kharia the gap between work and leisure has become considerably short. They have to work continuously and work hard during lean seasons, there being practically very little leisure time.

But the most noticeable aspect of their economic life is their perception of their growing poverty-stricken condition that they suffer from and their changing conception of want. The Hill Kharia perceive that compared to the situation that prevailed thirty or forty years ago their economic condition has distinctly deteriorated. Once they could depend on the forest to provide good fruits, tubers and meat. By collecting lac and silk cocoons and exchanging these in the market they could also earn cash money. But now they not only are deprived of these food items but also they cannot hope to get *dhela bhat* (rice) which peasants have in plenty. Not only the peasants possess all the qualities of good life but they have all *riz* (merriment) while their life is dull and devoid of any merriment. They see the peasant's life as full of leisure. The peasants work for one season in a year but after that they can roam about and go for various kinds of festivities in search of *riz*.

In Chapter 4 the functioning of institutions of family, kinship and community under the impact of poverty has been described. How far the interpersonal relationship is being affected by economic strain has been pointed out. It has been found that there is little effect of poverty on the role relationship in the family. Although with the participation in agricultural activities the wife's share of work has outstripped that of the husband's the relationship between husband and wife remains harmonious. Poverty and the tradition to set up new household after marriage have, however, brought a great deal of hardship for the aged parents. For the infirm parents the only recourse open is begging. The Hill Kharia families socialize their children in such a way so as to enable them to confront hunger and endure it.

Beyond family, the relationship between kin is circumscribed by poverty and by the stereotype notion of the outside world about the

whole tribe being "criminal". The effective relationship between kin is restricted between one's own siblings and immediate affines. Even this relationship has been severely affected by their constant anxiety of being hunted by the police. The community life is characterized by individuality and withdrawal from overt conflict.

Analysis of the three life crisis rituals shown that there is less elaboration in these than it used to be in the past. In marriage, the attractive method of marriage negotiation, the feast celebrating the end of pollution period in connection with birth, and the second burial (*dothupa*) and customary feast after it, in connection with death have become obsolete.

By utilizing Marshal Sahlins' model of reciprocity we have tried to examine the intra and inter-community relationships of the Hill Kharia. It has been found that in the situation of continuous economic strain that prevails, generalized reciprocity occurs in a very restricted scale. Generosity, hospitality and other altruistic behaviour are seldom found.

Relationship with the peasants occurs in superordinate and subordinate form of hierarchical interaction. While the Hill Kharia try to interact in accordance with the idioms of generalized reciprocity that governs human relationship, the peasants see their relationship with the Hill Kharia as wholly contractual.

About their participation in criminal activities it has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia are primarily drawn into criminal activities by the dominant peasants who use them in their village factional fights (Chapter 5). In this Hill Kharia's perception of their own situation of poverty and assessment of the peasants' life provide the rationales for participating in criminal activities.

In Chapter 6 we have described the manner in which poverty has been internalized through myths, stories, etc. The myths regarding the origin of the tribe describe their ancestors as cursed by ill fate. Thus, one story traces the descent of the tribe from Jara Sabar, the killer of Krishna. Another story describes the tribe's origin from Ekalabya, the character depicted in the Mahabharata as hunter. Still another story, which is most current, traces the descent of the tribe from the Sabar and the Sabari of the Ramayana who led a virtuous life of hunting and gathering but fell to bad times due to manoeuvres made by the caste people. The cause of being poverty-stricken is most commonly explained as due to having been fallen from the grace of supernatural power. The impact of poverty is even noticeable in their marriage songs.

The negative environment—dwindling forest, village economy, the nature of lowly social relationship with the peasants, relationship with the supernatural world and the overarching political institutions, etc.,—

gives rise to a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness to the Hill Kharia. All these generate a sense of worthlessness and despondency.

Although from the ethnographer's point of view the Hill Kharia's economic situation is desperate, they themselves still perceive of some islands of comparative plenty amidst general scarcity, such as, the short period when they collect *indur dhan*. Their conception of good life today centres around secure food from cultivable land owned by themselves. They pine for cultivable land and hope that with attaining this goal their days of scarcity and poverty will be over.

II

We have approached the problem with four hypotheses (Chapter 1, 7). It has been pointed out that the concept of "original affluent society" rests on the assumption that despite low turn-out of hunting and gathering mode of economy the people have no conception of want because they have abundant resources from which to select their life's necessities. Their easy going life is reflected in the way they squander food and enjoy large amount of leisure time. The hunters escape from poverty by organizing their life within the limiting ecology and by wanting little more than they already have. It has been argued that this situation can only be found where the world's most 'primitive' societies remain in isolation and their ecology is left undisturbed. Perhaps, another way by which the hunters can escape from felt economic deprivation is by withdrawing as far as possible from the village societies and clinging to the views that their own mode of life is much more satisfying. In an interesting study Adhikary (1978) has shown that the Birhor, another hunting and gathering tribe of eastern India, although living in close symbiosis with the peasant societies and pressed to be an appendage of it, have chosen nomadic life instead. Like the Hill Kharia they also suffer from scarcity of material goods but have managed to hold on to their own way of life. The dynamics of adopting to the limiting condition is reflected in their way of dividing their world of interaction into two worlds, *disum* and *muluk*. The former representing the world of the jungle, the interaction with which they find satisfying and the latter the world of man, or, more appropriately, the village societies inhabited by peasants, the interaction with whom they restrict to the utmost minimum. Adhikary has demonstrated how the Birhor maintain a satisfying social relationship keeping within the bounds of the ecology that surrounds them. In this they have been greatly helped by their own views of the world as well as the nomadic way of life.

But unlike the Birhor, the Hill Kharia have not adapted to nomadism. Instead they find themselves in a situation where their anchorage to the forest economic base has been rudely uprooted and they have been

thrown at the door-step of the peasant societies as landless dependent communities. Pressed by want of food they have tried to find their defined minimum requirements from the village societies. But here too, they have become frustrated. Continuous living in close contact with the peasants has changed their conception of want and life situation. We have already outlined the Hill Kharia's definition of felt economic deprivation and how this is even reflected in some of their myths. We have analysed how this deprivation has led to constraining the optimal operation of some aspects of their cultural life and interpersonal relationship.

It has been pointed out that the Hill Kharia and other hunting and food gathering tribes of the mainland represent a stage which has been designated as "secondarily primitivized" by Sinha (1969). This entailed not only reverting back to pre-existing economic stage but sometimes may also have left its mark on the culture of the community concerned. Levi-Strauss (1963) showed how secondary primitivization could be proved through controlled comparison. He showed that it could be demonstrated that some of the culture traits which had no functional utility were actually remnants of the past cultural practice of the community concerned. Apart from this important evolutionary consequences secondary primitivization may also generate the notion of deprivation. This may happen particularly when secondary primitivization occurs due to confrontation with ethnic group(s) which possesses superior cultural tools. In case of the Hill Kharia they perhaps had to face not one but successive confrontations with the Santal, Bhumij and the Kurmi Mahato communities. Each time they lost to the numerically strong and more cohesively organized social order than they themselves could muster. Unlike the caste stratified societies these societies excluded all outsiders from their activities and thus created a situation where the vanquished group, thus deprived and driven out, found no other alternative than to revert back to their former mode of production. The concept of evolution has inherent in it the notion of evaluation. Obviously, any community when it chooses another mode of life, does it after proper assessment of the relative merit of the life that it used to practise and the life that it opts for. Therefore, it may be argued from the above line of reasoning that secondary primitivization when it happens due to other than natural condition the situation of deprivation is immanent in it.

Another concept that has obvious implication for any sociological study of poverty is Oscar Lewis' concept of culture of poverty. Lewis defined culture of poverty as "a way of life handed down from generation to generation along family lines.....a culture in the traditional anthropological sense that it provides human beings with a design for living with ready sets of solutions for human problems" (Lewis 1966 : 19). Lewis

also pointed out that this sub-culture of poverty, "represents an effort to cope with the feeling of hopelessness and despair which develop from realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of values and goals of larger society" (*ibid.* XLIV). Lewis' concept was designed with a view to explaining the sociological implication of poverty in stratified capitalistic society. The concept of culture of poverty was tested in a Calcutta slum. It was found that due to the impact of poverty the core institutional structure of the slum life (family, kinship and community) has been altered or attenuated. What is most significant is the people's total helplessness (Sinha 1972, 1972a).

In the plural community structure of Purulia district the situation is different. The Hill Kharia have their own distinctive culture and values relative to those of the other communities. Their only aspiration is to emulate the economic life of the dominant peasant societies. But, to my mind, the moot point is not whether the concept of culture of poverty is applicable or not. The moot point is whether a hunting and gathering community having a "genuine culture" and which has been characterized as "original affluent society" can be affected by poverty or not. Following Marx we can argue that the most damaging effect that poverty renders is to effectively curtail and prevent optimization of cultural practices of any society. Analysis of the Hill Kharia society has shown that indeed this happens.

It has been posited that apart from felt economic deprivation, the marginal situation of the tribe relative to the village society and a feeling of powerlessness to meaningfully control the external world, contribute to the make up of the total configuration of the poverty situation of the Hill Kharia. It has been described how the marginal position of the tribe has effectively excluded them from inter-group relationship. It thus strengthens the superordinate and subordinate relationship between the Hill Kharia and the peasants. This trait has obvious analogues with the relationship that prevails between the higher and the lowly placed groups in stratified societies (Runciman 1972, Sinha and Bhattacharya 1969). Poverty does not have implications only in economic and social relationships. It also means a mental attitude towards life as Sahlins implicitly argued and Adhikary's study on Birhor world view demonstrates. Lewis had this in mind when he held that in Communist countries poverty does not exist, because people of the lower strata are meaningfully integrated with the state's political and economic structure and are made to feel having a sense of power and worthiness. The negative environment in which the Hill Kharia live generates just the opposite kind of feelings.

Every discipline has its own dominant paradigm which governs its research activities. Anthropology is no exception to this truism. We

have been taught to view the preliterate communities' life as more satisfying than the civilized societies. Holmberg (1950) shocked the academic world of anthropology by delineating the problematic living of the Sirinio of Bolivia. Recently Gardner (1966) demonstrated the individualistic cultural life of the Paliyan of south India as governed by, what he termed as, "memorate knowledge" (knowledge held at the idiosyncratic level) and "symmetric respect" (avoidance of competition and cooperation). The atomistic social life of the Paliyan has even been affected by violation of incest rules (Gardner 1972). Although the Paliyan live as a refugee from the encroaching caste societies in an inhospitable terrain, their life is not affected by poverty (*ibid* : 414). The Hill Kharia show a great deal of individuality and participate in criminal activities but have preserved the basic fabric of social structure, namely, role relationship in the family. As outlined above poverty does have an impact on the society and culture of the tribe. But the most significant aspect of the impact of poverty is the resilience shown by the tribe in adapting to the inimical environment. Perhaps this has been possible due to their phasing of experience whereby they have already learnt the art of living with scarcity and periodic hunger in their life.

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Gloossary

Ahira	Songs sung during the <i>bandhna</i> festival which coincides with <i>Kalipuja</i> delineating the relationship of cattle with supernatural world and man.
Akhan jatra	First day of the month of <i>Magh</i> when the Hill Kharia worship their supernatural deities.
Anchal	One end of <i>sari</i> which hangs loosely from the shoulder.
Anto	The notion that any food with coming in contact with a human being's mouth gets polluted.
Babu	Gentry, a group of people distinguished from other sections of the community by clearly delineable style of life.
Bagal	Agricultural labourer or eattle herder employed by a peasant household on annual contract.
Baghut	The spirit of a tiger specially venerated by the Hill Kharia.
Bahanai	Local kinship term for sister's husband.
Bajra	Millet.
Bangsa	Lineage.
Bandhna	Cattle worship ceremony held in the month of <i>Kartick</i> during <i>Kalipuja</i> .
Banshtia	A kind of parrot which is used as a symbol for a bride belonging to the age group 10-14.
Bankumari	Female spirit of the forest worshipped by the Hill Kharia.
Barpahari	The chif spirit of the hills.
Bahurupa Panchua	A malevolent spirit which harms the new born child causing it to take on various colours.
Barma Panchua	A malevolent spirit which suddenly attacks a new born child.
Bauko	Hill Kharia kinship term for father.
Bhakta	Devotees of god Siva who fast and undergo various penance during <i>gajan</i> .
Bheladagi	A kind of parrot used as a symbol for a bride of the age group 14-18
Bhurka taroi	Morning star (venus).
Bera	The sun.

Bihar geet	Marriage songs of the Hill Kharia sung during different phases of a marriage.
Binti	Folktales of the Santal.
Burha Burhi	Ancestral spirit of the Hill Kharia.
Chando	The moon.
Chamra	Rectangular sun-shade made of <i>sal</i> and <i>mahul</i> leaves especially for marriage ritual.
Chau	Masked dance of Purulia that used to be danced by a group of males depicting various mythological episodes during the day of <i>jagaran</i> of <i>gajan</i> festival but now-a-days held during secular occasions also.
Chenga	A piece of cloth or a garment.
Chihar	Bauhinia creepers, fibers and leaves of which were used to be extensively utilized for making ropes and rain-cover.
Chira	Flattened paddy.
Chor-kheda	Pole star.
Churgin	A malevolent spirit.
Chula sal	Oven where the ancestral spirits of the Hill Kharia are thought to reside.
Dada	Bengali kinship term for elder brother used by the Hill Kharia.
Damra Panchua	A malevolent spirit which causes death to grown up children.
Dangua	Menstruation.
Danr match	The group dance of the Hill Kharia.
Dhaman	Rat snake eaten by the Hill Kharia.
Dhamsa	Kettle drum.
Dharam	The chief spirit of the Hill Kharia.
Dhela bhat	Rice excluding the watery portion.
Dhudi bhaira	A constellation of stars used so as to determine the length of the time during night.
Dhuti	A long piece of cloth used as a garment by males.
Dih	Hamlet.
Didi	Bengali kinship term for elder sister.
Disum	Birhor's term for the forest domain.
Dopotha	Junction of two roads.
Dothupa	Second burial when some portion of the skeletal remains is dug up from the first grave and put in a new grave near the Hill Kharia hamlet under a stone slab.
Erenga Kharia	A term meaning wild Kharia used for the Hill Kharia in Orissa.

Furti	Merriment.
Gajan	Festival of Siva worship for three days in the month of April in which the Hill Kharia are now participating.
Gang	Rain cover made of <i>chihar</i> (Bahunia) leaves.
Garam	Village deity.
Ghatsratha	A part of mortuary ritual.
Garaiya puja	Deity which looks after the well being of the cattle worshipped during <i>bandhna</i> .
Garu khunta	The ceremony of playing with oxen and cow hold as a part of <i>bandhna</i> festival.
Gohal puja	Deity which looks after the well being of the cattle, worshipped during <i>bandhna</i> .
Gola	Peasant employer.
Goi	Monitor lizard
Gur	Molasses
Guru	Preceptor, term used for the mother's brother's son of Hill Kharia.
Handia	Rice beer.
Hathithakur	The spirit of the elephant venerated by the Hill Kharia.
Haritaki	A bitter fruit which grows wildly in the forest used in marriage ritual.
Hural	A jackal like animal the flesh of which is eaten by the Hill Kharia.
Indur dhan	Paddy stacked in the rat burrows in agricultural field which is collected by the Hill Kharia.
Jan kahani	Folktales of the Kurmi Mahato community.
Jethi	A Bengali kinship term used for father's elder brother's wife as well as mother's elder sister by the Hill Kharia.
Jhangar	Persons who keep awake the cattle during <i>bandhna</i> festival by singing <i>ahira jhumur</i> .
Jhumur	Folk songs.
Jor	Banyan tree fruits of which are eaten by the Hill Kharia.
Juha-khata	A star.
Kajal	Black dots.
Kachi Khaoa	
Panchua	Malevolent spirit which kills a new born child.
Kamin	A female labourer.
Kantaduari	Ritual held at the junction of two roads to prevent the spirit of the dead person following the people who went for disposing off the dead body.

Kanta-phura	Body pierced by big needles as part of penance during <i>gajan</i> .
Kara-khunta	The ceremony of playing with buffaloes during <i>bandhna</i> festival.
Khand katye namano	The ceremony to dispell the spirit of the dead from the shoulder of the persons who carried the dead body.
Kend	Fruits of <i>Melanoxylon</i> tree which are eaten by the Hill Kharia.
Khanti	Digging stick of the Hill Kharia.
Khatabara	Ritual to determine the correctness of the match between the bride and the groom.
Kodo	Kodo-millet, <i>Paspalum scrobiculatum</i> .
Kumba	Leaf-hut of the Hill Kharia used in the past.
Lag bir	Spirit presiding over the cloud.
Laya	Hereditary priest of the tribe.
Madal	Drum.
Magh Puja	Annual ceremony of spirit worship by the Hill Kharia.
Mahul	<i>Basia latifolia</i> .
Mar	Watery substance containing starch materials separated after boiling rice.
Marua	A ritual complex constructed under the <i>chamra</i> in connection with marriage. The whole complex is also regarded as a deity.
Muragarah	Place where <i>dothupa</i> is made.
Mayurchanda	A parrot like bird symbolising a bride of the age group 18-22.
Micha katba	Lies.
Muluk	Birhor term for the region where the peasants live.
Naba daka	Ceremony of offering rice to dead parent held in clan ossuary.
Nada	A malevolent spirit.
Niran	Dry season.
Nisangarah	Same as <i>muragarah</i> .
Pahari Kharia	A local term for the Hill Kharia.
Panr basa	Procedure of marriage negotiation.
Painsa-burha & Painsa-burhi	Spirits which look after the well being of the human embryo.
Palas	<i>Butea frondosa</i> tree which videly grows in the region.
Panchua bhut	A malevolent spirit which harms a new born child.
Phul-saya	Ceremonial friendship.
Raibaysha	Person who mediates as a go-between in marriage negotiation.

Rangahari	A spirit.
Riz	Merriment.
Sanjha taroi	Evening star (Mercury)
Sanga	Second marriage.
Sarul	Ceremonial ushering of new flower and fruits held in April.
Sal	<i>Shorea robusta</i> tree.
Sainthia Kharia	Hill Kharias living in Dhalbhum and the adjacent regions.
Sat-bhaira	Ursa major.
Seje-biha	Marriage by negotiation.
Sikari	Spirit controlling the supply of honey.
Sikar biha	Marriage by force.
Sikar naito	Hill Kharia adage meaning with the failure of hunting
bhikary	One becomes destitute.
Son-kahani	Folk-tales.
Tanr-jami	High barren land.
Taroi	Star.
Tarpa Panchua	A malevolent spirit which causes new born child to fret too much.
Tilai	Earthen utensils.
Tulsi pinra	A sacred place where <i>Basilium sanctum</i> plant is grown and worshipped.
Turukthupa	Hill Kharias who skip second burial.
Uran bir	Spirit of storm.
Vela	<i>Semocarpus anacardium</i> tree fruits of which are eaten when ripe and the other parts of the tree are utilized in ritual.

Appendix I

The letter written by the Hill Kharia to the author giving detail of their arrest in connection with dacoities is cited below. Two letters written by the author to the District Commissioner soliciting his intervention are also given below.

Mayuripotha
28. 4. 75

Dear Dikshit babu,

First of all let us convey to you our affection and love. Hope by the grace of God you are keeping good health. We were hoping that you would come here on the eve of Sivapuja celebration on the 7th Baisakh. News of the moment is that Kanu, Lagar, Bharat, Sagar, Sanat, Rengta pseudonyms and two other relatives are in police custody. On the date of hearing we met them in the court. They said that they were beaten up mercilessly in the police station. Every body has become very weak due to torture and anxiety. Our pleader Gopalbabu said that the aforesaid six people of Khariapara have been implicated in five separate cases. The two relatives have also been implicated in two cases. The pleader further said that if each one can give Rs. 100/- per head they can be bailed out.

Some people of adjacent villages came to Bharat and asked for his help for committing dacoity in the locality. Bharat came to me (Arjun Sabar) for suggestion. But Sambhu, Sanatan and myself chided him strongly and threatened him that if he would accompany those people we would beat him to death. We were not associated with any dacoity committed anywhere. Nevertheless police raided our hamlet on (27.3.75) the day of feast given on the occasion of Daman's marriage. They arrested and beat nearly everybody they could lay hand on and took them to the police station.

Now, if you would kindly come here for once we would tell you everything about these thieves hiding under the mask of gentleman. After handing us over to the police as thieves they are posing as completely honest gentlemen.

Another point, if government really wants to spend money for our welfare then please intimate your chief about our hardship or else ask your chief to pray to the government to shoot us. For surviving even

below the level of animal is not possible though we are born as human being and live in human society. Hope you would keep our request.

Sincerely,

Your Kharias of Khariapara, Kulabahal
L.T.I of (1) Arjun Sabar, (2) Amulya Sabar,
(3) Sanatan Sabar, (4) Pelaram Sabar, (5)
Bhim Sabar, (6) Lusu Sabar, (7) Sambhu
Sabar, (8) Bharat Sabar.

To

Sri R. Zhakuma, I.A.S.
Deputy Commissioner,
Purulia, West Bengal.

Calcutta-13
Dt. 29.1.76

Dear Sir,

Sub : Detention of six Kharia of Kulabahal
Village, P.S. Hura under MISA

Six of my Kharia informants of Kulabahal village along with their two relatives were arrested on 27.3.75 while they were taking meal in a wedding ceremony of a boy of their own community. According to Mr. M. K. Singh, S.P., Purulia, they were arrested for their alleged complicity in Manbazar P.S. case No. 6 dt. 10.1.75 under section 395/397 I.P.C. But according to the villagers they were arrested just after a dacoity has been committed in the house of Sri Gobardhan Mahato of Hullung village. Altogether five charges were framed against them, namely, G. R. Case No. 546 of 74/547 of 75/443 of 75/78 of 75 and 2290 of 74. Of the six persons arrested two were charged for being involved in two cases and the rest for a permutation and combination of five cases.

On 10th November 1975 I met Shri M. K. Singh and pointed out to him that their continued detention is telling heavily on their family members. I also pointed out that since they are very poor their relatives' continual effort to bail them out means spending hard-earned money which have far reaching consequences on their economy. On the advice of Mr. Singh I wrote a letter to him (dt. 11.11.75) giving the detail background of the dacoity committed in the house of Sri Gobardhan Mahato of Hullung and named two persons of the same village who acted as agent (viz, Purna Mahato and Manindra Mahato

alias Sial Singh who contacted Mangal Sabar and tried to lure him) for contacting the dacoits. I also pointed out how during police search the Kharias are subjected to various harassment and described how one constable removed two rupees and six eggs from Kartik Sabar's hut just after a dacoity on bus passengers were committed near Ladhurka village.

I received one letter from Kulabahal on 19.12.75 in which Kharias informed me that they have come to know, from one of their relative who has recently been released from jail, that all the aforesaid six persons have been exonerated from the charges framed against them but have been detained under MISA. After receiving their letter I paid a visit to Kulabahal village. I met the O.I.C. of Hura Police Station on 18th January, 1976. I was told that they were detained under MISA to prevent them from committing further crime. Incidentally on my return I also received one letter from the S.P. underscoring the same logic. To me this, to say the least, appear a singular case of lop-sided logic. Six persons were arrested purely on chance. Had they not been sitting with their meals they would have been able to avoid arrest. And probably another six persons would have been arrested and charged with the same offence. Among the persons arrested there is a 18 years old boy named Sanat who was working as bagal in the village. By indiscriminately arresting him police have most probably closed that avenue of employment for good. Another two persons, Kanu and Rengta had no record of past crime. I can well understand the Police's anxiety to prevent crime. But this can not be done by merely arresting some people at random. This also militates against law of causality. For without ascertaining the various factors involved in the crime and acting merely on the voodoo that all Kharias are criminals, chances are there that X may be arrested for Y's offence. Police is of the opinion that by detaining these people crime in the locality can be checked. But if we are to believe the police other able bodied persons residing in the village are also capable of committing crime and therefore should also be interned.

The Kharia inhabitants of Kulabahal village have asked me to convey their prayer to you that they are ready to live under constant police surveillance in their own hamlet. They are confident that police won't be able to find anything amiss with them. If this can not be done they pray that all of them should be put in jail. In course of my anthropological study of this community I have come to know many individuals who were put to enormous trouble by this kind of senseless action. A people who are impoverished beyond our imagination is made to squeeze out money from their normal expenditure to meet court expenses. These people were fortunate that some six years back government built for them tiled roofed huts. Expediency made them to sell the tiles and wooden beams for a song.

On behalf of these people I appeal to you for a review of their case. May I also take this opportunity to draw your kind attention to the following facts : my informants tell me that they have to pay two to three rupees to the jail guards in order to meet their relatives. I understand that this is contrary to rule. Persons who have been released from jail say that after they are released from jail they can not resume their natural habit. Because in the jail they are not given any serious job. These people are expert in fashioning locally useful objects from bamboo. If these people are given these jobs and new technique are taught it can enrich their life both inside and outside the jail wall. If possible they can be taught to rear honey and tasar or work in a loom. I know it is easier said than done. But I am confident that under your dynamic leadership this can at least be initiated.

With kindest regards,

Yours faithfully,
Sd/- Dikshit Sinha
Assistant Anthropologist

Appendix II

The Hill Kharia's World of Food

The local names of the naturally occurring food items utilized by the Hill Kharia given below have not been botanically identified. Asterisk marked items form the food items generally available in and around Kulabahal. Classification of animals made below are in accordance to the Hill Kharia's conception of the animal world. Only local names of the animals and insects are given :

A Roots and tubers (*aru* and *banora*)

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| *1) <i>Mana aru</i> | 12) <i>Kano aru</i> |
| *2) <i>Hantha</i> „ | 13) <i>Kulu</i> „ |
| *3) <i>Dhania</i> „ | 14) <i>Kanthor</i> „ |
| *4) <i>Mahar</i> „ | 15) <i>Khayam</i> „ |
| *5) <i>Banar</i> „ | 16) <i>Chagal</i> |
| 6) <i>Tonr</i> „ | <i>genthi</i> „ |
| 7) <i>Chayama</i> „ | 17) <i>Batra</i> „ |
| 8) <i>Banya</i> „ | 18) <i>Duna</i> „ |
| 9) <i>Chigo</i> „ | 19) <i>Chamra</i> „ |
| 10) <i>Bangar</i> „ | *20) <i>Banora</i> „ |
| 11) <i>Rejai</i> „ | *21) <i>Sutri</i> |
| | <i>banora</i> „ |

B Honey (*Mu rais*)

- 1) *Satchapa* 2) *Lele* 3) *Kathin ruis* or *Khari ruis*

From *Baisakh Kathin* variety of honey is available with the flowering of *sanla* flower. In the months of *Magh* and *Falgun* this honey dries up. With the arrival of *palas* flower *satchapa* honey is available and it becomes plentiful with the flowering of *sidha* flower in the forest. *Lele* variety is found only in the crevices of the hills throughout the year.

C Leaf vegetables (*Sak*)

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| *1) <i>Chantu</i> | *8) <i>Salanti</i> | 15) <i>Suruta</i> |
| 2) <i>Puin</i> | 9) <i>Kuila</i> | *16) <i>Nate</i> |
| 3) <i>Uri</i> | *10) <i>Sural</i> | 17) <i>Ghi Karla</i> |
| *4) <i>Chakanda</i> | *11) <i>Kana</i> | *18) <i>Susai</i> |
| *5) <i>Kantha</i> | *12) <i>Bhurbhuri</i> | 19) <i>Palmi</i> |
| *6) <i>Pipli</i> | 13) <i>Dhurup</i> | 20) <i>Kenchai</i> |
| *7) <i>Dima</i> | *14) <i>Khudi naita</i> | |

D Birds (*Pakhur*)

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1) <i>Tintin</i> | 13) <i>Burimakal</i> | *25) <i>Bani</i> |
| 2) <i>Dede</i> | 14) <i>Tinni</i> | 26) <i>Nakua</i> |
| 3) <i>Kutis</i> | 15) <i>Nakadeka</i> | 27) <i>Kawa</i> |
| 4) <i>Chipar</i> | *16) <i>Panrka</i> | 28) <i>Bulbul</i> |
| 5) <i>Bhulbhuliya</i> | 17) <i>Ban-murgi</i> | 29) <i>Kharkabani</i> |
| 6) <i>Kalidaha</i> | 18) <i>Churi</i> | 30) <i>Guiabani</i> |
| *7) <i>Kerketa</i> | 19) <i>Debchu</i> | 31) <i>Rembani</i> |
| 8) <i>Pencha</i> | 20) <i>Mayna</i> | 32) <i>Gadur</i> |
| 9) <i>Verchu</i> | 21) <i>Panikawa</i> | *33) <i>Bak</i> |
| 10) <i>Chandana</i> | *22) <i>Tentai</i> | 34) <i>Dhulabhurri</i> |
| 11) <i>Tiya</i> | 23) <i>Duni</i> | 35) <i>Shyamkahal</i> |
| 12) <i>Veladagi</i> | 24) <i>Pattipi</i> | 36) <i>Mayurkanthi</i> |
| | | 37) <i>Mayur</i> |

E Animals

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1) <i>Siara</i> (Jackal) | 8) <i>Chiru</i> (Squirrel) |
| 2) <i>Khenki Siara</i> (Fox) | 9) <i>Nakra</i> (Wolf) |
| 3) <i>Katas</i> (A kind of cat) | *10) <i>Sasa</i> (Hare) |
| 4) <i>Suraj</i> (Fox like animal) | *11) <i>Indur</i> (Rats, 5 varieties) |
| 5) <i>Hunral</i> (?) | *12) <i>Bayng</i> (Toad and frogs 3 varieties) |
| 6) <i>Udbiral</i> (Weasle) | 13) <i>Kachim</i> (Turtle) |
| 7) <i>Neul</i> (Mongoose) | 14) <i>Sona chita nakra</i> (?) |

F Reptiles

- *1) *Goi* (Monitor lizard) *2) *Dhaman* (Rat snake) 3) *Bara sap*

G Insects (*Pok*)

- *1) *Ugar pok*
 *2) *Ruri pok*
 *3) *Kurkut* (a kind of red ants)
 4) *Burhar*
 5) *Khulam* (Butterfly)
 6) *Burabagadulu* (Grasshopper)

Also eggs of various ants.

H Resins

- *1) *Asan*
 *2) *Dha*
 *3) *Sidha*
 4) *Arjun*
 5) *Sirish*
 6) *Sal*


I Fruits (*Phar*)

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| *1) <i>Sihar</i> | 5) <i>Pakir</i> |
| 2) <i>Halla</i> | *6) <i>Kend</i> |
| 3) <i>Kurur</i> | *7) <i>Vela</i> |
| 4) <i>Ben</i> | 8) <i>Benchi</i> |

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 9) <i>Hanur</i> | 19) <i>Makar kind</i> |
| 10) <i>Mamur</i> | 20) <i>Matmati</i> |
| 11) <i>Dumur</i> | *21) <i>Kul</i> |
| 12) <i>Dhana dumur</i> | 22) <i>Am</i> |
| 13) <i>Amra</i> | 23) <i>Aonra</i> |
| 14) <i>Agai</i> | 24) <i>Kadam</i> |
| 15) <i>Jamun</i> | 25) <i>Daha</i> |
| 16) <i>Kural</i> | *26) <i>Jor and Barjor</i> |
| 17) <i>Khenjar</i> | *27) <i>Mahul</i> |
| 18) <i>Panoar</i> | 28) <i>Kanthar</i> |

J Seeds

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| *1) <i>Kukri</i> | 3) <i>Kathin</i> |
| *2) <i>Bankuthi</i> | 4) <i>Samal</i> |
-



The Hill Kharia, traditionally a hunting and gathering tribe, live in the tract adjoining the three states of W. Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. Hopelessly outnumbered and encysted by other tribal and non-tribal communities they find it difficult to eke out an existence. Their forest *niche* has been more or less destroyed. In agriculture, late comer as they are, they find only one entry open, as labourers and that too to a limited extent. At one time they were known as a criminal tribe. Although the Act has been withdrawn the name and behaviour still persist.

In this *purposive* ethnography the impact of poverty on the Hill Kharia's social institutions and culture has been examined. Marshall Sahlins described the unalloyed existence of the primitive hunting and gathering tribe as "original affluent" condition. But where they live cheek-by-jowl with other communities and have an unequal access to the *basic* resources the condition is drastically altered. Although the Hill Kharia cannot be considered as suffering from *culture of poverty* they do suffer from relative deprivation. The author describes how this lead to attenuation in some social institutions and especially, in the concept of reciprocity which is corner-stone of all social interactions. The participation in criminal activities is also an extension of their deprived condition.

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